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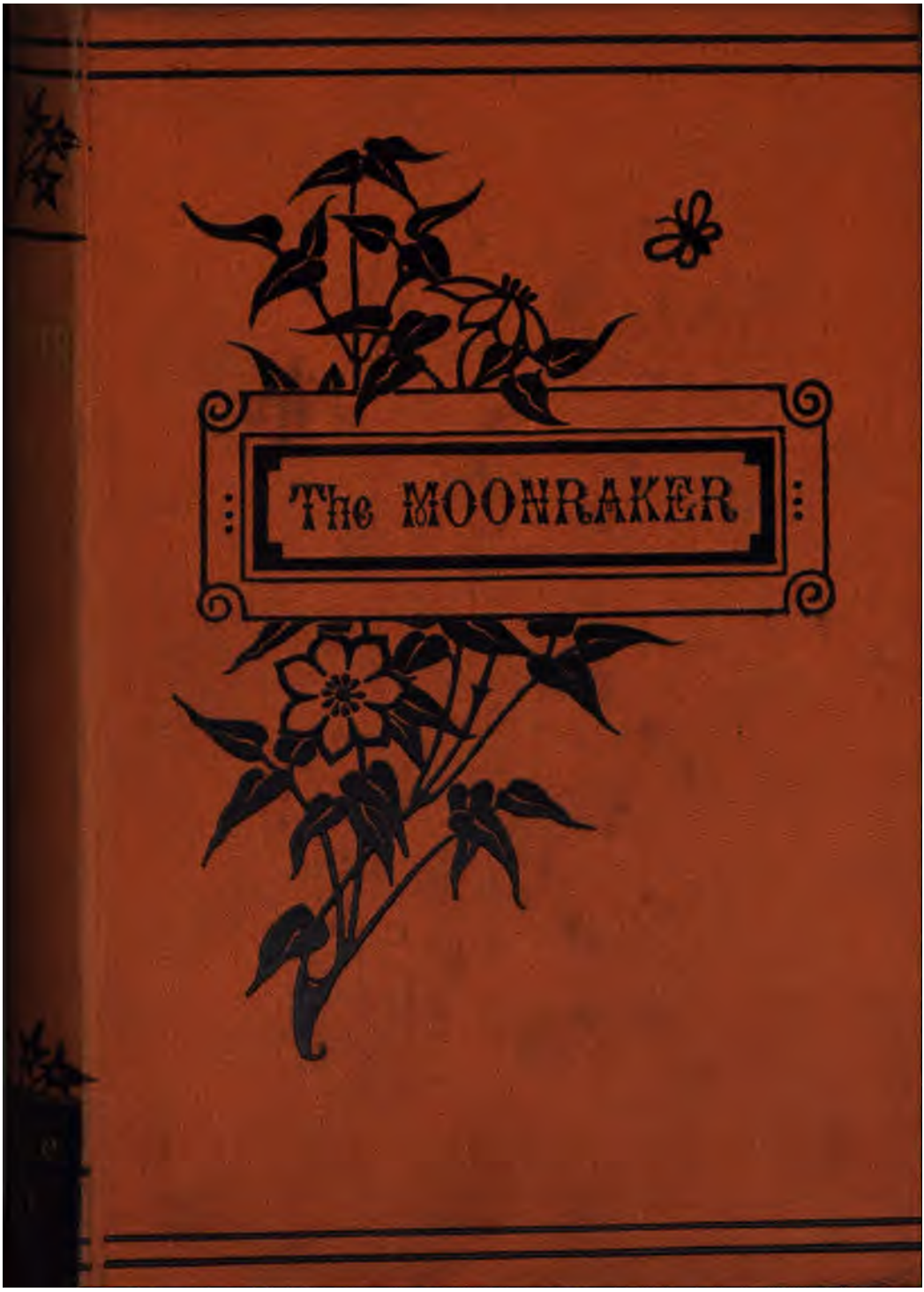
The MOONRAKER

KNOWLEDGE IS THE WING WHEREWITH WE FLY TO HEAVEN

THE MOONRAKER:

A Story of Australian Life.

BY

RICHARD DUMBLEDORE.

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TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE BARONESS BURDETT-COUTTS.

PREFACE.

(TO BE READ AND NOT SKIPPED.)

"IMAGINATION is the author of all error;" so says a most learned divine. Then logically there are no errors in this book, for it is a tale of real life. "Quorum pars magna fui" is the motto; which means "I saw it or did it all myself."

Enlightened reader,

I am yours most truly,

RICHARD DUMBLEDORE.

Buz Hall,
Baconshire.

THE MOONRAKER.

CHAPTER I.

"WHAT have you got there, my man?" said a traveller on the Baconshire Downs to a clown, who was probing the depths of a pond with a long rake.

"Zur," said the man, "I be a-fishing for that there cheese as you sees."

The moon shone fair, and as he spoke the rustic made another dash at its reflection in the water.

"Oh! the ignorance of these country

folks," sighed the traveller, as having inquired the way to Uphill he spurred on.

"Ah," chuckled the clown, "he bean't over-smart, he bean't," as with a more successful effort he dragged out of the pond a satisfactory keg of French brandy.

Near the said village of Uphill runs a wild path, across which the hazel boughs meet, known to this day as the Smugglers' Road. In old times the way from the coast led across these downs, which form the highest point, the backbone of southern England.

At Ravenstown, some four miles from Uphill, in the memory of the last generation, there was an old barn attached to the Vicarage where the smugglers used to find shelter, and leave in return for their lodging a little cask of the right sort. And this was an understood thing

until the residence of a strict Welsh clergyman whose conscience rebelled against this violation of law, and then the sea-robbers and their cask were seen no more.

As I said, Uphill and Ravenstown were about four miles apart, and the manorial rights of both were held by an ancient and powerful family. It was a sad day for Uphill when it was sundered from this patronage, and left to its farmers and farmyards, and to its tumble-down cotages, with none to set an example, no one to lead, no one to help.

One Sunday when there was a sermon, and *sometimes* there was a sermon, at the little church, the preacher was attacking prodigality and want of thrift. Farmer Butt, who had listened for some time with evident signs of approbation, at last

rose, and turning round to face the congregation, endorsed the worthy minister's exhortation by exclaiming: "Ah, ah, take care of the money, take care of the money." And on this principle they acted.

Men made money in those days, and they kept it. The modern gentlemen who drive nowadays to market, are as unlike their prototypes as leather gaiters and smocks are to black coats and plated harness. As regards the labourers too, the change is quite as great; barley bread and beans formed the staple of their food — but they thrived on it and lived to fourscore years and more.

There is an old lady in Uphill now alive who recounts her youthful prowess in ploughing One want pressed hard on all. In this, the highest village in England,

there was but one well, more than one hundred yards in depth; dug, so tradition says, when wages were fourpence a day. The cottagers were supplied from the drip from the thatch over each cottage. Now the village rejoices in a magnificent tank, holding many thousands of gallons. And in the sultry harvest days it is a sight worthy of India, or of Tadmor, to see the clerk of the parish serving out four buckets to each household, the allowance twice a week during times of drought, whilst the women with their yokes on their shoulder bless the name of their benefactor, who shall be nameless. Even now when the tank "gives out," water has to be carted from Willowbourne, about two miles distant.

Willowbourne is supposed by some to have been so named from the willows

which grow in its deep valley, and which are manufactured into a cloth which finds a ready market in Paris. The wood in its green state is subjected to three successive impressions from a broad serrated plane; a shaving some three or four inches wide is struck off, and the artisan or his boy then taking one end in his hand gives the shaving a flick as if cracking a whip, and the strip then sunders itself into threads, which are woven by the cottagers into a material somewhat resembling Osnaburgh in appearance.

In old days Willowbourne, if tradition is true, was "a terrible gurt place," "little London, zur, it were called;" but a great fire swept away little London, and it never rose again from its ashes. The tall grey church tower, which shoots up from the deep depression in the hills, is

said to have been built by John O'Gaunt, who made the wild downs around his hunting ground, and the "Willowbourne Chase" is a favourite meet of the hounds to this day. Tradition also tells how, down the long straggling row of hovels which once stretched into the hills, at curfew-time might be heard the clang of the iron gates of Lewisham Castle, which stood some two miles from the present village. But of the castle not one stone is left, and the great lords and ladies who hunted and hawked, and had castles on these inland downs, have deserted them, and too often their memory, save some mutilated statue or illegible record in the church, has perished with them. There are some records, however, which have neither perished nor passed; those of a race over whose relics scholars

and antiquarians have fought the battle of ink.

Around on every side are Tumuli and Cromlechs, the burying-places of the great, who, save this expression of their worth and power, lived in immemorial days. Too many of them, if not all, have been defaced by the spade and rifled, to gain some few bones, and an earthen pot, or some such treasure. Surely, when a mighty Assyrian Queen rebuked the avaricious monarch who broke open her sarcophagus in search of treasure with this inscription which met his eye: "If thou hadst not been the most godless of men, thou hadst not disturbed the sanctity of the tomb," she also rebuked those who in these pious days exhume the poor remains of their possible grandmothers. They might be left in peace, with the

brown, yellow, and blue down flowers growing over them, and old rooks cawing their requiem, as each evening they wing their way home to the forest. But these are days of science, and it is necessary for the well-being of the human race to discover whether our ancestors were long-headed or round-headed; perhaps the coming generations may characterise us in the Victorian era as belonging to both! And let us leave to the too-often-quoted New Zealander this quèstion, which he will doubtless find difficult and delightful. The present race of Moonrakers, as they are called, is a broad-shouldered, sturdy, "dour" generation, good labourers, and good soldiers when trained. In days not very long passed there used to be at the annual feast back-swording on a stage, where heads

were broken and blood ran freely. The Ravenstown villagers used to contest, and between Ravenstown and Willowbourne there was a grievous feud, of which I must give you an account by-and-by.

CHAPTER II.

THE great manorial baronet, who in old days reigned over Ravenstown and Uphill, used to call the former "The happy Valley." The dark firs which crown the hill under which the river runs, were planted at the request of a king, who suggested that wood was wanted to complete the beauty of the scene; and the king showed his taste. Once, when accompanied by the Vicar of the parish, the Baronet was riding across the grass land which skirts the wood, on which stands

a cottage, so picturesque that it is called by way of eminence "The Cottage on the Plain;" struck with the view, he asked his companion:

"Whose is that very pretty little residence?"

Gravely, for he was melodramatic in his powers, the Vicar answered, "Why, that belongs to a certain Baronet, Sir So-and-so," mentioning the name of the questioner. But powerful in talent, wealth, and position as the great man was, there was one class in Ravenstown whom neither power nor wealth awed or controlled. There are few, if any, finer trout streams in the world than that which flows now among bulrushes where the pools are deep, or over the golden gravel on the shallows, through the Vale of Ravenstown.

And among a host of poachers was one special family who claimed the right of privilege to net and wire trout and pheasant. It was said that an ancestor of this family had stood alone when the rights of the commons to fish and game were purchased by the great family. At any rate, once this sturdy Hampden of the village, old Ned, stood face to face with the great man, openly convicted of poaching.

There was a club dinner at The Blue Lion, at which the Baronet presided, and at the first course were served trout so red and salmon-like that one glance showed their birthplace.

"Where did these come from?" exclaimed the great man.

Deprecatingly the landlord falttered out:

"From od Ned, sir."

"Bring the rascal here!" and at the word, the tall weather-beaten poacher stood before the Baronet, and met his eyes with an unflinching gaze.

"You audacious scoundrel, do you dare to say these trout were not caught in my waters?"

"Dal it, oh!" said old Ned, whilst his grey eyes twinkled with drollery. "I was up this morning at four o'clock, and there, I seed these fish in my garden, nibbling at my cabbages, so I knocks 'em on the head."

It was no use to prosecute the case, Ned was impregnable, and left the room amid roars of laughter.

There was a powerful gang of wood and water robbers in those days, and many were the adventures of these minions of the Moon.

Once it got about that a raid on the waters was arranged, and the keepers, with all the helpers they could muster, kept watch at the suspected place by the river. Night passed — morning dawned; there was neither sight nor sound, save the quack of the drake and the deep cry of the moorhen. But what had been done in the woods? The ruse had succeeded well. Many a pheasant had been bagged, and as the poachers left the keepers arrived in time to find a row of wires set down the main drive, and in mockery, lo and behold, a fish left in each wire. They could hardly meet the world's laugh, which the stern philosopher cannot scorn, much less a gamekeper.

The old poaching tribe no longer exists, at any rate as it did in days gone by, and with it has passed the dour, iron, bean-

fed body and mind of the Moonraker. Dress and language have changed; the red cloaks are no longer seen in the village church; the smock-frock is rare; once it was full dress, the very *toga virilis* of the labourer, and unlike other articles of attire it improved in appearance as time went on; the dull green, its original colour, vanished by degrees beneath wash-tub influence, and put on a bright and Sunday-suited whiteness. Manners, too, are more urbane, and some little knowledge of the world has sharpened tongue and wit.

As an instance of dour stolidity and sturdy boorishness, the following story, well known in Uphill and Ravenstown, is told as follows:

The hounds were running in the great forest of Beechwood, and one of the hunters, a friend of the great Marquis of

Beechwood, found himself enclosed in a ring fence, out of which he could not find exit; seeing a labourer at work, he demanded in somewhat hasty tones:

"By which way, my man, am I to get out of this field?"

The labourer turned round, stared at him, then silently resumed his work. More impetuously than gently the rider repeated the question, and then the Moonraker, with an expression of mingled pity and contempt, answered:

"Why, the same way thee came in, thee vool."

Next day the man was summoned to appear before the Marquis, and when asked why he had so wantonly insulted a gentleman and a friend of his illustrious employer, he moaned out:

"Why, rabbut it, the vool had his waistcoat outside his cwoat."

In those days a garment called a spencer was in fashion, and by wearing such, the gentleman had thus condemned himself to the reprobation of the simple and sullen woodsman.

Another instance of the like dogged and independent spirit, is told as taking place in the same neighbourhood.

Again it is a hunting day, a grand one, for the great Duke, the Statesman and General of the age, had joined the meet.

There was much disappointment at Ravenstown when he was pointed out to the villagers as the man who had conquered "Bony."

"Dal it, ah!" said one gaping rustic;

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"Dal it, ah!" said one gaping rustic;

"he's as like old Sam Fowler as two peas."

The details of the run are now lost to memory, but this remains on record.

Galloping up to a gap in a hedge the victor in a hundred battles was confronted by a Moonraker, who levelled a pitchfork at the rider.

"Thee doesn't come through here," said the rustic spearman.

"Hush, my man," said a gentleman who rode up; "do you know who this is? You are speaking to the Duke of Wellington."

"I doan't care who he be," replied the man still firm; "Maester said I wern't to let nobody ride over hisen wheat, or I was to stick this ere vork in him fust."

"Quite right, my man," said the high-featured rider quietly. "Quite right; always obey orders," and he rode away; and this is the only instance of any one or anything turning the Iron Duke.

CHAPTER III.

THE traveller, as he crosses the high five arched bridge which spans the river of Ravenstown valley, looks on one side on the old manorial house standing amidst its elms and limes; and on the other on the waters which fall over the cascades under the bridge and spread their lacework of foam across the deep pool. The old house is silent, lonely and tenantless now; "frequented by few is the grass-covered road" which leads up to it, once so neat and shining with bright yellow gravel; but

though "men may come and men may go, the stream flows on for ever;" and on the flashboards of the dam may be seen, even by untrained eyes, the great trout industriously keeping their place against the rush of waters or taking up a strategic position where the mingling currents afford a comparative calm, so that they may dash either way for plunder.

To trail a bright fly through the foam, and to see the broad golden side of a three-pounder as he rushes at the bait, to strike home sharp, and to feel the rod tugged down as if you had nabbed an alligator, whilst the monster scurries over the flashboards down down into the deep pool, is to feel and see what not even old Isaac himself could worthily describe.

Very proud in days gone by were the magnates of Ravenstown Manor of their

piscatorial rights; and once a year the great man would drive in state down to a certain point where the said manorial rights, though good, were in abeyance, and with his own hands throw a small silken net into the stream, and this done return in state as he came.

The river, once the haunt of British princes, now celebrated for British beer, is the glory of Ravenstown, and from this cause it arose that there was a deadly feud between its inhabitants and those of Willowbourne, the village which lies under Uphill. It is a dangerous thing to disturb the embers of a smouldering fire and to irritate wounds now somewhat healed by time; but let us hope that the ancient animosity will not be reawakened, specially as there is a blue-coated policeman now domiciled at Willowbourne and two at the

rival village. All places are not equally blest.

Ravenstown rejoices in one of the finest streams in England; Willowbourne has a pond and two pumps; and Uphill has one well, but it is too deep to get any water up easily, and several tanks; thus all ought to be happy. But what will not pride and insolence do?

The youths of Ravenstown were always a naughty set, always ready to "terrify" their neighbours and to make a "caddle;" and in this wise the feud, so legends say, arose. Besides the red trout and the large shoals of shining dace, and the robber pike with his sullen viperous glance looking out from the green weeds; the rushes and alders of the Ravenstown river are tenanted by the moorhen and dabchick. Perhaps the ornithologist may

plead that dabchick is not correct as a name, if so, he may suggest the right one. Now the dabchick is a beautiful little fellow. He spends his time continually in diving; down goes the small round head, up go the black-webbed feet, and like a fish the little dab goes in quest of food under the waves, and comes up again as dry as a toast; and so on through the livelong day.

Now, one of the Ravenstown youths "flushed with insolence and beer," managed to capture one of these charming little creatures, and concealing it in the vast pocket of his velveteen jacket, as the shades of evening fell, stole through the woods and over the furzy hill, till he beheld the lights of Willowbourne twinkling beneath him.

The night was dark, and the streets

silent, broken only by sounds of revelry from the Blue Boar. He crept to the margin of the pond, and drawing out of his pocket the dear little dab, dropped him into the muddy water. Favoured by the darkness, this arch conspirator regained his native village in safety and unsuspected.

Next morning all the Willowbournites, men, women, and children, mustered round the pond, and shouted with glory as the dabchick dived and rose again. But what was to be done? This was evidently a portent as we read in old times when it rained fish in Etruria. A general council was held, and men talked, and still the diving went on.

Now there was a wise man in Willowbourne in those days (there used to be such—where are they now?), to him they deferred.

"What is this strange crittur ?"

"That," said Solon, "is a sea-swallow. He's comed from the sea, he be."

"And what must we do to un ?"

"You must shoot un," was the oracular reply.

There was a long gun in the village. This was carefully loaded; the strongest man aimed it and pulled the trigger. The lock flashed, up went a puff of smoke, down went the dab, and over his head went the shot. Up came the dab tight and right as ever. This was repeated till it was feared ammunition would run short.

Again counsel was sought of the wise, and under his direction a wall was hastily run up, with a hole through which the gun was pointed with deadly aim, the warning puff was seen no more and the cruel shot

stretched the poor little dab lifeless on those muddy waters.

Surely this was enough, but the youth of Ravenstown, not satisfied with this murderous enigma, again tested the energies of knowledge of their rivals by dropping in the midst of Willowbourne Street one of the large silver eels of Ravenstown river. Again the wise man was consulted on this phenomenon.

"What be this here?"

"Why this here," said Solon, "is a sarpent."

"And what be we to do with un?"

"Why, you must kill un," answered the wise man.

"And how be we to kill un?"

"Them sarpents dies by drowning. You maun drown un."

The strongest man in the village grasped

the eel and bore him to the pond, and he swam away as one to the manner born.

As time went on, the conspiracy was unravelled, and as knowledge increased, and men read, and travelled, and studied natural history more, the Willowbournites found out the dark and astute trick which had been played on them.

In revenge they tell a counter tale—but there is some reason to question its truth. They say that a householder at Ravenstown, wishing to encourage the rooks to build in his elm trees, ordered his butler in a black tail coat to climb up and sit amid the branches and cry "caw, caw," but that the ruse did not succeed. Be this as it may, many memories have perished; even now there is no record of the great battle which stained Willowbourne Chase with English blood, when and where Cavaliers

and Roundheads joined in the fell revelry of war, but the legend of the sea-swallow, the sarpent, and the rooks, still hold its memory green.

CHAPTER IV.

STEEP and stony is the road which leads up from Willowbourne to Uphill. The mighty cart teams strain against the collar as they breast the hill. There is a place where, so tradition says, all the horses of the village came to a standstill with an empty waggon. A few trees are pointed out as the site of Dor's grave, but who or what Dor was, none can tell now.

But here one day a cart team stopped as if stricken dead, "the 'osses was all of a

muck of sweat and wouldn't gee nor come hither," so the tale runs; more horses were sent for, all in vain till the spell was broken by an old woman.

Another instance of witchcraft is recorded by an old carter as follows:

"I were a shottering off the team to drink at the pond by Dor's grave, when I looks up and I sees a gentleman on horseback with nar a head watching I."

These headless Cavaliers seem to flourish in this neighbourhood; as an old sexton of Ravenstown used to narrate how in a certain wood "you med see a woman riding on a 'oss with nar a head all in a blare of fire!"

It was in the village of Uphill that the great astronomer built an observatory, but all that can be learned now of interest about

him, is that he had two cats, one big and one little; and anxious that they also should take their observations at night, he had two holes made in the door, one for the big cat and another for the kitten. It is questioned, however, whether he ever resided in the village at all; and so to leave legends and tales of witches, and bygone days, let us look at Uphill and its surroundings.

Far away on every side stretch the downs with their memorial mounds and vast camps — in summer-time carpeted with flowers, in winter a howling wilderness. Yet although the winds sweep over the expanse with a bitterness and violence no greatcoat will keep out, yet who ever heard of a shepherd suffering from consumption or chest complaints. These pulmonary attacks, the scourge of our

country, are comparatively unknown on the chalk downs. And many who spend more than they can afford in seaside lodgings redolent of gas and drainage, and of the last occupier who left his scarlet fever behind, might put off the day of their death by taking a cottage and a walk, with some bacon for breakfast, on the mossy, sweet, and matchless downs of Uphill. Very beautiful it is to see every morning the long array of race-horses on their different training grounds. Now wheeling in circles under the orders of the master, and then cantering off and vanishing in a strange shadowy way over the rise.

At the time we write the Vicar of Uphill, Mr. Moreton, was a man who loved and understood horses as well as men, and visited alike his parish and his stable. The

Vicarage house, with its roses and honeysuckles, looked bright and pleasant as most vicarages do and should; but the chief objects of general admiration were a bevy of peafowl which sat on the white gates, spread their tails in the sun, and occasionally mounted the roof. Japanese chicks with their snowy fluff, and guinea-fowl, added variety, while two gigantic cats guarded the house; one of them trained as a retriever to bring in the game when the Vicar made a raid against the sparrows, against whom only he proclaimed war. His gardener, groom, and right-hand man, named Ford, with his son Ned, the hero of our tale, was the very slave of the menagerie at the Vicarage.

Ford was always giving a "mou'ful of victuals" to one or other of the two or

four-legged parasites; and if they were not supplied, he complained that he was troubled in mind, and that his sleep departed from him.

CHAPTER V.

GRAND and glorious were the names of the feathered and four-footed pets at Uphill Vicarage.

Flora, a well-bred mare, with her two growing daughters, Minna and Brenda; Daphne the cow, Hydarnes the master peacock, with his stately wife and brood; Pasht the monster cat, and Doldrums who acted as retriever on sporting days. Amongst these, with the Brahma fowls, and the "rabbuts" as he called them in Moonraker phrase, little Edward Ford,

proud of his father's and of his own responsibility, moved as a king.

When visitors from London came, during the summer, it was Ned's office to marshal his little army, and show how gentle and well-disciplined they were. At his well-known cry, "Kalloo! Kalloo!" the peafowl would eat from his hand the Indian corn; the Japanese chicks would cluster round him as he explained the characters and peculiarities of each; even when he brought in a basket of eggs, he was not content till he had made clear to whom they each belonged:

"Please, mum," he would say to Mrs. Moreton, "this is the grey hen's, this is the golden pullet's, and this is Mrs. Jappy's," with sundry remarks such as: "Please, sir, Mrs. Darnes is agoing to make a nest among the nettles in the

stack-yard, and I be terrified, maybe a fox will get her."

Nothing escaped his sharp eye, he was always on the watch. But his greatest delight was to call to Minna, a yearling filly, and when his father had lifted him up, and put him on her back, to ride round the house in front of the drawing-room, guiding the beautiful and gentle creature with a halter.

"That's a strange little fellow," said a friend of Mr. Moreton's, a Mr. Fortescue, who was a great judge of horses, "and that's a singularly pretty filly. She is well bred, I am sure."

"Yes," answered Mr. Moreton. "She descended from Eclipse, and she is quiet, owing to the treatment of my man Ford and his boy. My horses require no breaking in, they begin their education as

soon as they are born. A horse will do what you want, when he knows what that is."

"True," said Mr. Fortescue, "quite true, generally, but I wish it was more practised. We, who have dominion over the beasts, should then have less to answer for. That lad will make his fortune some day."

"I wish," replied Mr. Moreton, "all the boys here were like him. I have one young Turk in the place, who cannot keep his hand from stones, nor his head from mischief; he rejoices in the name of Jem Johnson; he is the very opposite of Ned. I caught him one Sunday morning pelting a most lovely little squirrel, who was about to make his home in the Vicarage firs. Another day he was found tormenting a hedgehog."

"He seems," said Mr. Fortescue, "to need rubbing down with an oaken towel. Why not lecture on these subjects, on Sundays? The farmyard is the labourers' kingdom. He can be a merciless despot, or a merciful master, friend, and physician."

"Well," answered Mr. Moreton, "I do that same, and with all my powers; but I think if, as is done in France in a somewhat similar way, prizes were given to men who, like my man Ford and his boy, are worthy of their trust, it would do more good than all my sermons. And if officers were appointed to see that the cattle were not ill-used, overworked, or underfed, then the farmyard would be regulated by a system of rewards and punishments which would be effectual. It is a scandal to our land to see so many horses blind

with age and misery. And it is grievous to one who can read the expression of a horse's face, which is a sealed book to those who are not familiar with the animal, and indeed to some who are, to see the unutterably piteous look of the eye when he is wearied, worn, overdone and hungry. It is strange that suffering should make them blind, but it does. See," continued Mr. Moreton, "there's Brenda, that pretty thing just three years old; I can get off her back in the middle of the downs, fling her bridle on her neck, and she will walk by my side like a dog, stop at a word, and let me mount."

"Does she not take liberties sometimes?" asked Mr. Fortescue.

"Well," replied the Vicar, "if I have a geranium or a rose in my button-hole, she will show her love to her master, and her

fondness for flowers, by stealing my bouquet, and eating it."

Ned now brought round the gentleman's horse, and ducked as he received sixpence, which he rolled over and over in his hand.

"Good-bye," said Mr. Fortescue to his friend. "Stick to Ned, and convert Jem from his evil ways."

CHAPTER VI.

THE summer slipped quietly by. The long harvest days came, when everybody, men and women, boys and girls, grandfathers and babies, all lived in the fields from morning to night; so that a stranger, passing down the street, might have fancied Uphill lay under the spell of some enchanter, who had put everybody to sleep. Not a sign of life was there, except some stray cats, who, shut out from their accustomed hearths, wandered about or sat patiently watching by the cottage doors

until evening should bring the families home.

But harvest was just over, the crop had been a wonderful one; the reapers would tell you how their arms had felt the weight of the heavy ears, as they drove their sickles through the golden forest, whilst the women who followed each reaper down the line to gather and tie, had had to get her neighbour's help to set the sheaves up in shock. Nearly all was in now, and the thatchers were busy trimming and finishing up the stacks in the crowded rick-yards.

Nowhere round the country was there a finer show than at Mr. Hunt's farm at Uphill, where old John, his bailiff, lived; and as Mr. Hunt looked round one September afternoon, he might well feel proud at the well-earned result of much labour and more thought.

"Well, John," said he, "it is just about a fine crop and no mistake, and won't disappoint us as it did last year; forty bushel to the acre, I reckon."

"Yes, master," answered the old man, "somewhere thereabouts. You see, it's all hard grain. Now look at this old stack of last year's straw, it looked very well when it came in, but, dear me, when we came to the threshing, it turned out poor tackle."

"Well, we must soon be on at; and by-the-bye, get that straw carted away to-morrow. I don't care about the stacks being so close together." And away rode the prosperous, busy farmer.

If it had been a good year for the masters, it had also been good for the labourers. The gleaning, or "leasing" as it is called in those parts, had been un-

usually successful. Where there were many little hands in a family, enough had, in many cases, been gathered to sell and pay the rent: whilst others, if not so fortunate, had yet brought home enough to make some "lease-corn" bread, so much sweeter, they said, than the loaves they bought.

But this was nearly over too, and that very afternoon Mrs. Johnson had told her neighbour she should give over and go home.

"If there is any more left on the ground, the birds can have it, or our pig will get it when it goes stubbing; so come along, Jem and Polly, let us go home and get some tea."

Home they went, and soon the sticks were laid for the fire, but where was the match-box? Nowhere could it be found.

"Well, Jem," said his mother, "never mind; run to shop and get a box; come straight back, for we want our tea."

Away went Jem and bought the matches, and then bethought him of a short cut back, through a gap in Mr. Hunt's rick-yard. He was going straight across, when, in idle thoughtlessness, he began to try the matches on some of the loose straws which projected from the huge pile about which Mr. Hunt had spoken to old John. At first, Jem carefully put them out as the fire crept near to the heap; but just then Spot, John's little white terrier, came, and he turned to look for a stone, in his usual spiteful habit, and while thus engaged the fire spread. Fizz, crackle, what was that? he looked round quickly, the stack was all alight.

Wild with amazement, Jem beat the flame with his cap, and kicked with his feet against the straw, all in vain. Choking with fright, with a white and frightened face, dropping some of the matches at the gate in his haste to get through, he sped home.

Fanned by the wind, the fire had now got a firm hold; the tongues of flame darting up a little higher and a little higher, caught ever and anon at some projecting straw, and flickering hither and thither in the wind, carried destruction to some new point. So on and on went the mischief and that which Jem might easily have put out at first, was each moment becoming less under control. At last the flames burst forth up and above the stack into the clear blue autumn sky, and Ford, going down the Vicarage garden, just opposite,

was the first to see the light. Setting down his basket, he ran across to the farm, where the only occupant of the house, a young girl, was busy in the kitchen, and had neither seen nor heard anything of the danger, away to some of the cottages to look for help, then on to the fields, whence the men came trooping at the ominous word "Fire," though now there was indeed no need to speak. High up and far away amongst the trees which surrounded the rick-yard, the flames shewed distinct and terrible. One man was sent off to Mr. Hunt, who lived two miles away, and a call was sent to the Willowbourne engine by a stranger, who, riding by, offered his help, and then all hands to the buckets.

Mr. and Mrs. Moreton had been out making some calls on distant friends that afternoon.

"It is such a lovely afternoon, don't hurry," Mrs. Moreton was saying as they neared home; "from the sign-post at the top of this hill, we shall see Uphill, and we shall have few more days like this, so let Flora go gently." But her voice changed as they came to the spot she had indicated: "Look! look! our house is on fire!"

From their position the Vicarage seemed indeed set in a background of flames; well might she and the Vicar, not knowing as we do where the fire was, feel alarmed.

"Come, Flora," said Mr. Moreton, "I have never put you out yet, but I can't spare you now. Go on;" and he gave her a smart touch with the whip.

Away went the good mare, and soon they got into Uphill; relieved from his worst fears, hastily the Vicar ran across to the rickyard.

What a wild sight met his eyes! Twilight was falling, and large and weird looked the burning stack. One glowing mass of fire, still retaining its shape, but crowned with fantastic tongues of fire which lighted up the faces of the anxious and busy crowd. Some of the men hastily cut down branches from the ash trees to save them from catching, and with the boughs beat back the flames as they fed along the ground amongst the dry litter which cumbered the yard, and at one time almost reached the great stacks of wheat which stood a foot off from the now roaring mass. Others got ladders, and getting as near as the heat would let them, stuck green boughs on the neighbouring stacks and barn, and rudely thatched them with fir branches, so that the burning speel might not fall on them.

Water-carts were soon set in requisition, and willing hands worked at the village pump to fill them, and in the yard others dipped out the water and filled the buckets. But it was slow work, and great was the joy with which the Willowbourne engine was hailed as it drew up at the gate.

Now I fear Captain Shaw would not have thought much of the queer little wooden concern which was now so heartily welcomed; but it did its work, and a powerful stream of water was soon playing on the burning mass.

In spite of all, higher and brighter burnt the fire. The speel flew about scorching and setting fire to the trees where it hung, and fears began to be entertained for the little cottages just across the lane which bounded on one side the yard. Hastily beds were taken down, and chairs and

tables carried out into an adjacent meadow; and there old widow Ford sat in the midst of her possessions, expecting each moment to see her old home blaze up, yet refusing to listen to her son's entreaty to go to his home.

"No," she said, "if she had to stop there all the rest of her days she would stop by her bits of things."

Mr. Hunt was everywhere directing and guiding, and by his orders wet blankets were thrown over the thatched roofs of these cottages, and men stood on ladders ready with boughs to intercept the burning speel, should it come so far.

Mr. Moreton, shading his eyes with his hand from the glare, turned and saw Mr. Hunt in his shirt sleeves, with anxiety deeply lined on his face, standing by his side.

"Shall you save it, do you think, Mr. Hunt? Is there much there?" said the Vicar.

"About ten ton, sir, and was to have been carted away to-morrow," answered the farmer; "however, I don't so much care if we can only save the other stacks and the buildings. If it once lays hold on that barn, it must spread to Manor Farm, and Heaven only knows where it will stop then; but the wind is gone down and the men are working with a will."

And it was, indeed, a good sight to see how the men had come out courting danger and defying the heat. And now some of the old and more experienced hands gathered round the master and gave their opinion to this effect:

"We can't save the straw, sir, all the water in Uphill won't put the fire out."

"Let it go," said Mr. Hunt, "let it go; it's the wheat and barns I am thinking about."

"Well then, sir, let us guard the wheat and barns, and keep the rest of the water till the fire is burnt down."

So said, so done. Each dangerous spot was guarded by watchful eyes and strong and ready hands; and so the weary hours of night wore on. It was an appalling sight.

The flames began to subside and the danger to diminish, although it was not over. Still the strong current of heated air, rushing up, tossed to and fro the scorched and withered boughs of the trees overhead, as if they were shaken by a giant hand. The pile of straw lately so high, had now sunk down and presented one red glowing mass with here and there

a rising flame. But the wind was still calm; and at about one o'clock in the morning the engine was manned. Again the heavy thud was heard in the silence of the night mingled with an occasional shout of triumph. The water-carts and tanks were emptied on the fast blackening yet smouldering heap.

It was over and the victory was won.

"Before you go, my men," Mr. Hunt had said as the crowd began to disperse, "I want to ask is there any one knows how this fire began?" There was no answer. "Well, I have only to say if it was wilful (which I can't believe), I shall have the author of it severely punished, if it was an accident, I shall pardon him if he comes straight forward and tells me; but I shall spare no trouble to find out

how it originated. My thanks to all who have helped. Good-night."

There was one woman in the crowd who was thankful that the darkness prevented others from seeing the colour rush to her face as the farmer spoke, and that woman was Mrs. Johnson. Had not Jem come home pale as a ghost? was he not lying frightened under the bedclothes now? had she not picked up at the gate and quietly hidden in her hand three loose matches?

The talk of the village gradually turned on Jem as the author of the fire. One had seen him with the box in his hand; another saw him creep through the hedge, and little by little the whole story came out.

Mr. Hunt's pardon was asked and granted, and so ended what might have

ended my story, inasmuch as had the fire spread, the whole village would have been burnt down, and I should have had nothing more to tell you about Uphill.

CHAPTER VII.

"On the first of November if the weather holds clear,
An end of wheat sowing do make for the year."

I DON'T know whether the farmers of Uphill believed in the wisdom of this old proverb; but certainly they had acted by it. Each morning, long before daybreak, the boys would go whistling down the street to the different farm stables, where the big horses were wakening up and listening for the voices of the little lads, to whom, though often not tall enough to reach to their shoulders, they yet

rendered such unquestioning obedience.

"Come up, Champion." "Come hither, Captain;" and the gigantic horses were led out to the long day's ploughing.

Slowly and patiently on they would go, at each step their shaggy feet sinking deep into the stiff clay, whilst the boy at the head of the team, whistling or humming the tunes of last Sunday's hymns at church, would heavily plod along by the side. The singing was not very fine, indeed, very often it was very flat, for Uphill people are not naturally musical; but cheerily the sound came, borne by the breeze across the rolling downs, and many a lonely and weary traveller, toiling over the stony hills, had felt his heart revive at the sound of some old and perhaps well known tune.

How delicious did the bread and cheese

or bit of cold bacon taste to the plough-boy as he took his midday rest out under a hedge with the sweet smelling fresh-turned earth around him. And when the shadows began to lengthen, there was the ride home on Champion's broad back with the prospect of hot supper and bed.

The ploughing was over, and it was a pleasant sight to watch the sower walk straight up and down the furrows scattering the seed so regularly and evenly. And the jolly old rooks, and the starlings too, seemed to enjoy the sight very much, and came wheeling down in great companies to see that the work was properly done. It was quite wonderful how fond the birds had become of farming. For fear the corn should come up too thick they would pick out a grain here and

there; and what was more they would bring their friends to help. So day by day the flocks of birds on the fields gathered larger and larger.

"We must stop this," said Mr. Hunt, as he looked over the lower acre field; "here, Johnson, you must send that boy of yours along with Charles Davis with the old gun to scare these birds off. Why, here's all the rooks in Uphill."

"Why, as to that, master," answered the labourer, "these are not our rooks at all, they come from a long way off; a matter of four miles away, I expect; strange ways have the rooks. Our Uphill chaps go off at daybreak, right away sometimes as far as the forest, and feed there all day, whilst others come here; and then at night each party finds its way home."

"How can you tell?" asked Mr. Hunt.

"One rook is as like another as two peas in a pod."

"Eh, but I've watched them many a time," replied Johnson. "Many a long day a shepherding have they been my only company, and to see them in the rookery! if a jackdaw gets amongst them—eh, my, but isn't there a pretty kick up! Caw, caw, no end to it, till you are deaf; and all the old rooks flying round and round, in and out, to turn him out. I suppose they have got their rulers and a parliament too, for they are always talking."

"Well, anyhow they must be driven off this field, so send the boys here to-morrow." So saying Mr. Hunt rode off.

Jem was only too glad of the day's holiday, and with Charles Davis, a much older lad, started off carrying the old gun, a powder flask, and some shot in a paper.

A black army of rooks had settled right across the field when they got there, but at the sight of the gun, the wily birds shifted their position, so as to put more space between them and that terrible instrument of destruction with which they had had an early and life-long acquaintance.

"Cunning old fellows they are," said Jem.

"Aye," answered Davis, "one has only to point a stick at a rook flying, and he will shift his course anyhow to keep out of range, but now where's the shot?"

For some time the lads amused themselves by constantly firing off the gun, and as master paid for the powder it was all very good fun; but the day was cold and stormy and dinner-time drew near.

"Let's get under the succour of the fir-

trees. Here's a nice corner," said Jem, "I am going to get some sticks. We'll have a fire."

"Well, I should have thought you had had enough of burning and fire after that little game of yours with the stack not so many years ago," answered Charles.

"Let that be, can't you!" angrily retorted Jem, who could not bear to be reminded of that dreadful night. "There's no stacks here—not a straw to catch anyhow. We have frightened the old rooks, they won't be back again to-day. So let us make ourselves jolly and comfortable."

Jem gathered some of the dry grass and leaves and found a few sticks, but somehow the fire was not a very bright one.

"Pour a little powder on, that will make it light up," said he to his companion.

Charles took the flask out of his pocket, and as the dark grains fell lightly on the expiring embers, the boys watched them sparkle as they ignited.

"Pour a little more," said Jem.

Charles shook the flask. The powder fell in a light stream, the flame shot up. There was a blinding flash, a cloud of smoke driven before the wind. The boughs of the fir-tree were wildly shaken and there was silence. What happened exactly, no one can tell.

Some time afterwards, but how long he could not say, Jem opened his eyes, and found himself lying on the other side of the hedge. Where was he? Was he at home? where? he could not tell. He tried to rise, but his limbs seemed to have lost their power. He felt the rain falling on his face; he held his hand up, and,

although half blinded, he could see it was streaked with blood.

"How came I this side of the hedge? where is Charles? and the fire? and where is my hat? what has happened?"

He staggered to the hedge. There was Charles stretched pale on the ground, blood streaming from his jaw. There was the gun still leaning against the fir-tree, and the ground where the fire had been was swept clean as if with a besom.

Jem was still breathless, and with difficulty the words came from his scorched and bleeding mouth:

"Charles, Charles, are you dead?"

He shook him by the collar.

"No," said the lad faintly, "I'm not dead; but I can't see. Let us try if we can't go home."

Charles tried to get up, but fell back. Jem began to cry and felt the salt tears scalding his skinned face.

"Oh, do try, Charles; I want to go home to mother," said he, half sobbing.

At last he did get on his feet. What a frightful sight—his face blackened and bleeding, the sleeve of his jacket in ribbons, his right hand so disabled that he had to grasp the gun with his left. Mechanically he felt for the powder flask. Not a vestige of it was left. It had vanished.

Staggering and dreamily the boys found their way to the high road. Half blinded, and half deafened, they indistinctly heard the voice of old John.

"Whatever have you lads been doing? Well, you are a sight enough to terrify

one. Come along home. Give me the gun."

Charles, who lived half way up the hill, was left on the way and to the care of the doctor, who, hastily summoned, was soon on the spot. His jaw was not broken, but across his throat he will wear to the day of his death the marks of that tremendous explosion. . . . . .

Poor Jem, sickened and faint, was glad to feel the arms of his mother as she carried him upstairs and laid him on his bed. . . . . .

"This is a bad business," said poor Mrs. Johnson, as the tears streamed down her face, to old John and to the neighbours who had gathered round.

"Yes," answered old John, "it's a bad business, but it is well the lads are here to tell the tale; for there was more than half

a pound of powder in the flask when I sent them out this morning. It is a bad business for boys to play with fire, and I should have thought Jem had had enough of it by this time."

CHAPTER VIII.

"WELL, Ford," said the Vicar one day to his man, "I should think it is pretty well time Edward began to work. Why, how old is he now?"

"He is turned thirteen," answered the groom; "and I was thinking of speaking to Mr. Hunt about the under-carter's place after Michaelmas. You see, sir, he is as fond of animals as ever, and there would be a good beginning for him, he might get on and be a carter."

"As to that," said the Vicar, "after his

schooling the lad ought to do better for himself than settle down to a mere labourer's life. I'll tell you what I have been thinking. Let him come here and work in the garden, and about the stables; he would rather look after his old friends, than after the great cart horses I know. And you see, he is a light weight and a capital rider, though he is so young, and I would trust him with Brenda and Minna better than I could many an older lad. So you had better talk it over with your wife."

The week after Michaelmas saw Edward established at the vicarage, and so Mr. Moreton gave him his first help in the upward path of life, which Mr. Fortescue, as you may remember, had long since prophesied lay before him.

Edward liked his new life very much,

and was never more pleased, than when, having made his arms ache rubbing down the glossy coats of his two favourites, he would help his father to dress them in their flashing harness, and jumping up behind Mr. and Mrs. Moreton in the carriage would watch the pretty creatures run so lightly along the road.

The garden work he did not like, flowers were all alike to him, he never could remember the names of any of them, and at first he made some terrible mistakes, as when he cut down all the chrysanthemums close to the ground, just as they were coming into blossom.

"Please is master down?" said he, coming into the house, very early one morning.

"All right, Edward," replied the Vicar's voice on the stairs; "what is it?"

"If you please, sir, I heard last night up street, that the hounds are to meet at Uphill this morning."

"Are you sure you are right?" said the Vicar. "Well, I am sure, I am very glad. I was afraid they were never coming here again. Tell your father to see about moving the lower gate. They must meet in our meadow."

Breakfast over, great was the preparation both indoors and out of doors for the expected guests. A table was carried out, and placed just within the fence which separated the meadow from the garden, and on it was arranged some light refreshments for the visitors. The lower gate was taken off its hinges, and already the news had spread and brought many idlers round the entrance.

"What are you doing with those cats,

Edward?" said Mrs. Moreton, surprised to see the lad carrying off the struggling Pasht and Dolly.

"Please, ma'am, I am going to shut them in the coach house. If once the dogs were to catch sight of them it would be a bad day for poor Dolly."

"You silly boy," answered Mrs. Moreton; "why, the dogs know better than that. They would not dare even to look at them, without their master's permission. However, it's a kind thought, if it is a stupid one, so be quick and come back, for that looks like something dark moving along the road by the sign post."

From the Vicarage garden you could see a long way at Uphill, and gradually the moving mass shewed itself more clearly, to be composed of brown and white spots, while here and there a scarlet

object seemed to move in the midst somewhat taller and larger than the rest. Meanwhile there came up from different roads, now a little party of two or three well-mounted old fox hunters, now two brave girls and their brother, now perhaps a little lad on a sturdy pony ready to go anywhere, jump or scramble through anything. Many of these were friends of the Vicar's, some had come long distances, and Mr. and Mrs. Moreton and their servants went from one to another and pressed them to take some refreshment.

But soon every one's attention was turned to the hounds; and what a pretty sight it was to see the "spotted beauties" come trooping into the meadow, and at the word of command gather round the two red coats who had had charge of them, and quietly lie down in one

group at the upper end of the field. They had come eight miles already from the kennels, and seemed glad of the rest, but at the sight of the master of the hounds entering the meadow, with an unmistakable chorus of welcome they were on their feet in a second, and joyfully gathered round him.

"Good dog! well done, Smiler! down Ajax!" and he turned to speak to Mrs. Moreton.

"I am sure it's very good of you to let us meet here. I think we must be moving now. We have not had a good season so far, but I hope we are going to improve."

"Well, Captain Sinclair," said Mrs. Moreton, "I only hope you will come across the fox that carried off Blackie, my poor old hen, the other day. He

must be somewhere in Uphill woods, I think."

"That is where we must be off to now," answered the Captain turning his horse's head. "Good-bye and thanks."

And so led by the huntsmen and guarded by the two whippers-in, the "spotted beauties" with their feathering tails, moved on through the meadow gate out towards the copse on the downs.

Stretching far along the road, the villagers admired and criticised the mingled and motley group that followed. Here and there a farmer riding side by side with some nobleman or gentleman, in faultless get-up; the homely attire of the one contrasting with the gallant accoutrements of the other; the tweed suit, the brown gaiters, the ill-kept

gear, the rough unclipped cob, setting off the brilliant pink, the enamelled boots with their silver spurs, the flashing bits and stirrups, and the clean-limbed hunter shewing in the net works of veins meandering over his satin coat his blood and training.

CHAPTER IX.

"We want one of the snow ploughs I saw in Norway when I was there," said the Vicar, as he watched Ford trying to clear a path in the snow down to the gate one winter's morning. "Capital things they are, and would be most useful here. I should like to make one, it is not much like a plough, for it is only the forked branches of a tree, but when dragged along the ground it pushes the snow away on either hand, and leaves a clear path."

"I don't know how that would do here,

sir," answered the man; "you see, these roads are so narrow, and worn so deep, there is nowhere for the snow to go to."

"Anyhow, if I had got one, I would send it along the Willowbourne road, and open the way for the mail-cart; that's not in yet, and I am looking for my letters."

"I expect, sir, you will have to look for them. Mr. Hunt's team had to come back this morning, the horses were up to their chests in the drift. If the mailman comes at all, he'll have to walk. I don't know when I have seen so much snow down in one night."

Indeed, the fall of snow had been an extraordinary one. The barometer had proved a true prophet, it had gone rapidly down for several days, and no one exactly knew what was coming, and every one dreaded something unusual. But late the

previous afternoon the snow began to fall in flakes. Small at first, but as night came on, growing thicker and larger; and when morning broke, Uphill looked as desolate and dreary as the Arctic regions.

"I am so glad the coals were given out yesterday," said Mrs. Moreton; "there is no cottage need be without a good fire, and I am sure it is wanted this morning."

"Yes, indeed," answered her husband; "yes, and it's lucky I made Ford bring in that hay. There would be no getting at the stack, and the horses and cows will be all right now."

"Oh, they are all right enough, trust Ford for looking after them! But I wonder whether Edward has thought about the peacocks. Can't you shut them in the cowshed to-day?"

"I am afraid not," answered the Vicar; "out in the open air they will stop, up in the trees they will roost, though, as the gamekeeper said the other day, it blows cold enough to strip a feather. You remember the galignas you admired so much in Devonshire? Well, our friend told me, the rougher and colder the wind the higher they would roost, and I suppose it's the same with peafowl. It is strange a bird coming from so warm a clime should be so hardy, but they wear good greatcoats, and, like the rooks, they always keep their heads to windward, and pluff out their feathers to keep their feet warm."

"Well, poor dears," said Mrs. Moreton, "I will give them an extra breakfast, at all events, this morning, and as they have not taken the pledge, they shall have a little warm beer poured over their bread; but

here they come, under the verandah. Look at the old hen; she is stretching out her long neck, and pecking at the glass to try and look in at the table; but poor Hydarnes does not seem to be very happy; what a pity to trail those lovely feathers in the snow. There, that is all they can have now," and Mrs. Moreton shut the window and turned to other matters.

The short winter day was soon gone, very little could be done at Uphill, it was quite enough trouble to keep oneself alive and to look after the fire, but still there was some work that could not be neglected. The shepherds, however inclement the weather, must not forget their charge, and it is a pleasant sight to see the sheep in the folds, fossicking about with their black noses in the cribs of hay, plentifully supplied to them during the winter months.

The carter boys, too, are bound to be in their masters' stables to attend to the horses at six o'clock in the morning, and wrapped up in their old long blue coats as they go whistling along, they put to shame the idle people who are still warm in bed.

In fulfilment of this duty Jem Johnson and his mate, Tom Finch, passed along the next morning as usual on their way to the farm, under the boughs of the Vicarage elms, in which the peacocks roosted. Early as it was, the reflected light from the snow enabled them to see indistinctly the forms of the birds resting on their accustomed place.

"Let us have a heave at the old cock," said Tom, "and wake the old fellow up," and at the word, picking up a rough flint from the half-ruined wall on which they

stood, he flung with such good aim that the missile passed through the tail feathers which hung drooping from the bough. Hydarnes, thus rudely awakened, roused himself, and standing up, raised his long and slender neck, thus presenting a tempting mark to Jem, who held in his hand a short, thick hedge-stake, which he hurled with only too true an aim. With a sharp, hard cry, the bird sped down into the deep snow, whilst the boys ran on, half-frightened, yet laughing, to encourage themselves as boys will do, in approval of their wanton cruelty.

"Have you seen the peacock, father?" said Edward; "I have fed all the fowls and everything, and I've kept some corn for Hydarnes and I can't think what has become of him, he is always one of the first to come. Kaloo! kaloo!"

But there was no answer.

"Perhaps he is gone under the laurels for succour," answered Ford.

"I've looked there, I've looked everywhere. Tell the master."

The news was quickly told, and the Vicar, and Ford, and Edward searched everywhere, plunging through the deep snow, beating the laurels, and peering into the different sheds and farmyards around. Still the wintry wind howled. Evening fell, the other peafowl went to their accustomed roost, but poor Hydarnes came not.

The next day the snow began to waste under the influence of the winter sun, and behind the door of an out-house, where he seemed to have crept for shelter, Edward was startled to see projecting through the snow, the well-known feathers, whilst the

body of the bird remained buried in the drift.

Hastily lifting him up, and shaking the snow from the dark blue feathers, he ran to the harness room with his poor favourite, and there, before the fire, endeavoured to hope that life was not gone.

"Perhaps, sir, he is not quite dead," said he to Mr. Moreton, who looked sadly on. "Perhaps he's only frozen, and may revive if we warm him; look, his eye is quite bright, and his legs are not stiff. He gave me a kick once. I'd give something if he would kick me again."

"Hydarnes will never kick you again, Edward, I am afraid," said the Vicar. "The frost you speak of is the frost of death. Whatever has been the cause of it I don't know, but he is dead."

Edward still continued to smooth the

ruffled feathers, and tried in vain to keep back his tears.

"I don't think, sir, there ever was a more beautiful bird, and he used to eat out of my hand."

CHAPTER X.

"At last, here is a letter from my old friend Cameron," said Mr. Moreton one morning, as he opened the post-bag. "It's ages since I have heard from any one in Australia. Ah! just as I expected, he has been up the country, and so could not write. What do you think? he has bought a new station, and wishes you and me could run over and see it; don't I just wish we could? however, that is out of the question; but then he goes on to ask me if I can find one or two nice strong lads to

put upon this station, along with a steady old Irishman, who is to have charge of his sheep there. Now, who is there we could send ?"

"By all means pack off Master Jem," answered Mrs. Moreton; "that boy is the plague of the village, he is utterly incorrigible. After that affair of our poor peacock, I gave him up; but out there he might turn over a new leaf and come to some good; here he is going to ruin."

"Well, he is strong enough, no doubt; but if I send him, I must give Cameron some account of him, and as he is a good sort of fellow, perhaps he might like to take the lad in hand. Then who else is there ? Cameron pays their passage out, and he wants them as soon as may be. Let me see," and the Vicar seemed lost in thought. "Why, of course, there, how

stupid we are. Here is the very boy on the spot. Edward's a good lad, a good rider, used to stock, and sure to do well."

"You can give him an excellent character," replied Mrs. Moreton; "but I shall be sorry to lose him, he has been so many years about the place, he seems quite one of us; however, it would be a great chance for him, and after all, in these days, Australia is not quite the end of the world, and, after a bit, one fine day, a well-dressed, handsome young gentleman will call upon us, and we shall be surprised to find it is Edward come back with a lot of money, and ready to buy Cedarwood Park. That is the way it always happens in books, and I hope that will be the case now."

The Vicar laughed, but saying he must see Ford and give him a few days to con-

sider about it, went off to the garden, where he found father and son hard at work, potato planting. There were no more potatoes planted that day, Edward went about with an air of mystery and importance, but before night the matter was settled, and the news soon spread in the village that two of its lads were going off to "furrin parts." Hardly any one in Uphill had ever seen the sea, and many were the remarks on the spirit of the boys in thus going out to seek their fortunes. The Vicar busied himself with the arrangements for the voyage, and Mrs. Moreton added to the outfit an extra dozen of shirts, telling Mrs. Ford, to her great astonishment, that there was no water at sea to wash in.

The days flew quickly by, and the time came to say good-bye to Uphill.

Now, if I were telling you a story of two girls I should have to say that they cried, and kissed their mothers over and over again at parting from them; but boys are very different; they don't cry at these times. If inclined to give way, the thought comes that they must bear themselves like men, so you must not think Edward unfeeling because, after having said good-bye to Minna and Brenda, and all his old friends at the Vicarage, he drove off with Jem, under the guardianship of the Vicar, with a bright face and a brave heart, waving his hand to father and mother, and all his old companions, whilst old John flung a shoe after him for good luck, cautioning him with his last words, "to take care that the kangaroos and other wild beasts did not eat him up." As to Jem, he was only too glad to get away.

Those of my readers who have always lived in London, can hardly imagine the utter amazement which fell upon the two lads when they first found themselves in the streets of the great city. They had rarely seen any other illumination than that which shone on winter evenings from the farthing candles in the village grocer's shop; nor had they ever seen a greater crowd than that which gathered at Willowbourne fair. The endless lines of gas-lights, the blaze of light and splendour from the shops, the ceaseless thunder of the cabs and omnibuses, almost took away their senses.

"This way," said the Vicar, as he turned along Cheapside.

"Hadn't we better wait, sir," said Jem, "till all these people are gone by?"

"We should wait a long time, Jem, if

we did. Come along bravely, lads; don't lose sight of me. I know this part long ago, and the lodgings I have taken for you for to-night are close here," replied Mr. Moreton. "I'll meet you betimes in the morning and see you safe on board. Here we are," and he knocked at the door of a house in a by-street. "Here are my young friends, Mrs. Andrews," he said to a motherly-looking elderly woman who opened the door. "Take care of them, and give them some supper; they have had a long day. I will be with you by eight o'clock in the morning and settle everything."

At the appointed time the next morning, Edward, who had been watching at the window, exclaimed:

"Here comes the master," and ran down to let him in.

"Well, my lads, ready? I've sent your boxes on. I've seen Captain Silverwood, and he says the *Blackwall* will get under weigh at twelve o'clock to-day, so the sooner we are on board the better."

Long before they reached the docks, they saw the tall masts high up in the air and the countless yards crossing one another, with here and there a sail, let loose to dry, flapping in the air.

"There," said Mr. Moreton, "there lies your home, boys, for the next few weeks; that's the *Blackwall* with her head pointing out towards the stream."

The lads were staring intently at the huge black hull with its white line when the voice of a sailor, "Boat, sir, for the *Blackwall?*" startled them.

Strange was their feeling when they

stepped into the boat and felt it move beneath them, and stranger still when they set foot on the busy deck of the great ship.

It was a scene of confusion, almost of terror, so wonderful was it in its novelty; so very strange that the lads had no time to think. Men and boys swarming up the rigging; stern, hoarse, and unintelligible commands shouted from below and answered from above, as if from voices in the air. Wherever they stood, they seemed to be in the way.

"There is Captain Silverwood," said Mr. Moreton, saluting a stout, short, weatherbeaten gentleman; "here are my youngsters that I spoke to you about, Captain; for old acquaintance' sake I know you will look after them a bit on the voyage."

"Ay, ay, Mr. Moreton, I will send the second mate and see them comfortable in their berths;" and the Captain turned away to his numerous and pressing duties.

The tears at last stood in Edward's eyes, as Mr. Moreton, shaking hands with him and Jem, said a few words of kindly farewell; bidding them ever remember the lessons he had taught them.

"Be brave and true, my lads; fear to do wrong, and fear nothing else. Begin each day and each week as I have told you. Make it a duty to write often, and let us, when we see your faces again, have cause to feel proud of the lads of Uphill."

The Vicar left. Shortly afterwards the steam-tug took the vessel in tow some miles down the river, but feeling the power of

the western breeze the tug was cast off with farewell cheers, the sails were spread, and as evening fell the shores of England vanished from their view.

CHAPTER XI.

DREARY and wretched were the first few days at sea for Edward and Jem; but when, having shaken off in a great measure their sea-sickness, they were able with giddy heads to creep up the ladder, how welcome was the sweet fresh breeze to the country boys after the stifling air of their berths below. And oh! what a grand and glorious sight met their view. With her vast sails set, the great ship was tearing through the water, rolling a volume of snow-white foam under her bows, as she

burst through the waves driven by the mighty power of the wind. The boys staggered to the side, and holding on by the shrouds looked on a scene which once viewed is never forgotten.

There was the old boatswain with one of his mates taking short turns on the fore-castle, and on the poop, with his glass under his arm, walked the Captain; whilst here and there on the hencoops were seated some of the cabin passengers.

Presently they saw the Captain stop and speak to one whom they recognised as their friend the mate, who, touching his hat, advanced to the polished brass rails which ran along the poop; and, clear above the roar of the wind and the rush of the angry water, came the hoarse words of command: "All hands reef topsails, ahoy!"

At once, from all parts of the vessel, the sailors, some of them barefoot, gathered at their appointed posts. The ropes, which were coiled on the belaying pins, were flung with a crash upon the deck; the huge beam, which Edward afterwards learned to call the topsail yard, was lowered several feet, whilst the sail bellied out, being no longer strained by the ropes. The sailors swarmed up the shrouds, and with terror and amazement the boys saw them with only the foothold of a rope on which they stood, clinging to the yard which stretched far beyond the ship over the boiling sea.

But, although the sail was loosened, it was still so strained by the power of the gale that it was necessary to run the ship into the wind and shake the sails as the sailors say, and while the huge field of canvas

was flapping with a noise like thunder, it was lashed with the unfailing reef-knot to the yard.

And now the men seemed rather to tumble down the rigging than to descend; and all hands manned the halyards to pull it to its place. Edward and Jem, awakened to life, lent their strength to the work, whilst the rude and rough tones of the song, "Ho! rouse her home! Ho! cheerily, man;" encouraged them, and directed the regularity of their efforts. Once more the voice of the mate was heard: "Make fast, belay!"

The sail was reefed and the work was done.

The days passed, and they entered the Tropics; there the sea is blue and the breeze steady. The sunsets are so beautiful that no pen can describe them, no picture do

them justice. The sea was no longer a desert; clouds of flying-fish would be seen bursting from the side of a wave in their flight from the cruel dolphin. Great mollymawks with their outspread wings wheeled round overhead and gazed with their big staring eyes down on the vessel; whilst the dear little petrel, or Mother Carey's chickens, as the sailor's fondly call them, followed in the wake of the ship.

Edward was now quite at home, and had learnt the names of the ropes and sails; but his daily occupation and chief delight was tending the animals on board, which seemed to bring back to him the memory of his early days and his old friends at Uphill. He and the steward's mate each morning fed and watered the fowls, ranged in their long coops on each

side of the poop; not forgetting the cow, who had a berth to herself near the fore-castle.

But the longboat with its pigs and sheep was his greatest pleasure. The pigs were easily managed, not so easily the sheep. Under the burning sun and fed on dry hay, it was touching to see the eagerness with which they, each morning, gathered round him as he stepped amongst them with a bucket of water and a glass bottle, opening their mouths with his fingers he inserted the neck of the bottle and greedily the sheep would drain the last drop.

It required the observant eye of one practised to distinguish animals so much alike to know who had been served and who not; but as the weeks went by the numbers diminished, and names were easily

given to the poor survivors. Indeed, in the southern seas, the supply of fresh meat began to run so short that Captain Silverwood, when they sighted the desert islands of Amsterdam and St. Paul's, gave orders for the boats to be lowered for a fishing expedition.

"Please, sir," said Edward, touching his cap, "may Jem and I go with the gentlemen?"

"Well, my lad," answered the captain, "you have been a good fellow, and made yourself useful. You may go;" and turning to the passengers he added: "Mind, gentlemen, when the gun is fired, be ready to come on board at once; there is neither food nor water on the island, and you would miss the *Blackwall* dinner, if the wind should sweep us off, and you had to stop there a month."

All now crowded merrily into the boats, and shot away from the ship in the direction of the island. And, although the day was calm, so mighty was the roll of the great southern waves, that when the boat was in the trough of the sea, not only the hull, but even the tall masts of the *Blackwall*, were hidden from their sight.

"Oh, my!" said Jem, "this seems as if we were on the downs again, down in Compton Bottom, amongst the hills," but there was no time for talking. They neared the island, the lines were let down, and they dragged in the great snapper so fast that the boat was soon sufficiently loaded.

"Let us have a run on shore," proposed one of the gentlemen. At once the boats were run in, and they landed on

that wild and desolate island called St. Paul's.

"Here's a gun, if any one likes to take it," said one of the passengers. "I am going to make a sketch. Here, Edward, will you have it?"

Edward, gun in hand, eagerly sprang up the mountain-side with Jem closely following, his heart beating to suffocation as he breasted the steep hill. At first they amused themselves shooting the wild birds which came fearlessly close to the muzzle of the gun; but in about an hour they returned to the shore, and found the passenger who was sketching alone, the others having gone off a little way in the boat.

"You have missed your dinner, my lads," said the gentleman, laughing.

"Never mind," answered Edward;

"I'll try a little fishing on shore now," and taking a small line and hook from his pocket, he attached it to the ramrod of his gun, and threw it, baited with a tiny scrap of meat which he found from the remains of the luncheon, into the salt lake, which is divided from the sea by a ridge of rocks. At once he caught one of the million fish with which the lake swarmed, and then and there boiled it in one of the hot springs which run from the volcanic rocks.

"Hark," exclaimed Jem, and looking towards the ship he saw a cloud of smoke; "that was the gun, and here comes the boat to pick us up."

"All here," shouted the mate.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the merry reply, and gladly the party regained the deck

of the *Blackwall*, now their home. And so ended the pleasant fishing expedition to the desert island of St. Paul.

CHAPTER XII.

On sped the *Blackwall* over the long rolling seas. Each day the passengers would gather round the captain as he took his observation to determine the position of the ship, and Edward, creeping as near as he could to the company on the poop, one morning heard the welcome news:

"To-morrow, by twelve o'clock if the wind holds, we shall sight the Heads."

The sun went down for the last time

on the *Blackwall*, which had been so long the home of the two boys. Orders were given to keep a good look out "for'ard." The night passed, and morning saw the deck crowded with the passengers in anxious expectation.

Near at the appointed time a loud voice from the royal yard sung out: "Land on the lee bow!" and shortly afterwards a long line of low blue mist was seen on the horizon. On they went, and before night they could see opening the brown wood-covered hills of the great south land.

Early next morning the gallant ship swept in between the limestone rocks of Melbourne Heads, and with favouring wind and tide she rapidly neared the low sandy beach at the head of the bay. With a crash and a plunge as the chain

grated from the hawsehole, the anchor cleft the waters and fixed its hold on the sandy channel.

It was amusing to see the change in the passengers. Check shirts, and sou'westers had been discarded, and you saw snow-white linen, and here and there a chimney pot hat, with its imposing and uncomfortable looking appearance.

Edward had just rejoined Jem, after bidding a hasty farewell to his only surviving charge "Duffy," as he called the cow in memory of Uphill, when he heard the loud cherry voice of a stout, bearded gentleman, who had come up the gangway from one of the many boats which jostled one another round the ship.

"Well, Captain, have you got a consignment of live stock for me? My name

is Cameron, and I am expecting two youngsters."

"Here they are," replied the Captain. "One of them I will answer for, as good a lad as ever stepped; the other you can make better."

"Come, lads," said Mr. Cameron, "got all your traps? follow me and let's make for shore."

As soon as they were seated in the boat, Edward produced Mr. Moreton's letter, which he had carefully kept in his jacket pocket.

"Ah, I know the hand-writing of my old friend," exclaimed Mr. Cameron, and glancing at the boys while he eagerly turned over the page. "Are you ready, lads, to begin a bush journey at once? I have got a dray and bullocks with a small flock of sheep camped for the night

under charge of old Hogan, my shepherd. I see you've each got a blanket, and I must find you a strap and a pannikin a piece, and then you'll be all right for the bush.

As soon as they landed he mounted a rough little horse, as Edward noticed, without shoes, and the lads each carrying his little box, the party, guided by Mr. Cameron, travelled slowly over the sandy hills. Presently they saw through the thick low shiock and mimosa trees a blue column of smoke rising, and beside the fire, dressed in fustian trousers and a blue shirt, and wearing an old straw hat, stood a tall long-limbed stalwart black, Mr. Cameron's bullock-driver.

"Well, Bullet," said his master, "where's Hogan with the sheep?"

The black man who was lashing the

thong of his whip to a long pliant stick which he had just cut, pointed to the line of sheep which were now seen advancing under the trees, shaking their heads and their white ears to drive away the flies and mosquitoes which tormented them on their onward march.

"You could not give us a bit of silk, could you, sir?" said Bullet, looking up.

"Here's my old handkerchief, if that will do," answered Mr. Cameron.

Eagerly Bullet seized the proffered gift, and tearing off two strips with his teeth, he rolled them into a little cord, and attaching it to his whip, he whirled it with his long arms, bringing it down with a crack like a pistol shot, making the boys start, and causing the sheep to huddle together into a frightened mass. Old Hogan, the shepherd, now joined them, and Mr.

Cameron giving him charge of the expedition, and saying that he should look for them in three days at Boniong, turned his horse, and rode off to the town.

And now for some account of the first night camping out in Australia. There were the trees, there were the sheep, there was the dray, there was the fire, but where were their beds? Some of my readers, perhaps, know the strangeness of the first night away from home, but stranger still was it for these lads, the prospect of lying down on the bare ground with only the stars above them. There was no time to think.

"Here, you boys," said old Hogan, "look alive, make up the fire; shoulder up a good back log. Bullet give an eye to the sheep, whilst I go to the water hole for a kettleful. I saw your bullocks down there just now."

Edward and Jem at once began to forage under the trees, and were amazed at seeing the athletic black half bearing, half dragging an enormous trunk with its branches, which he flung down by the fire. Hogan now came back with the kettle, and as the water boiled, the boys saw with surprise the process of tea-making in Australia. Inserting his huge bony hand into a bag, the old shepherd drew out as much tea in his grasp as would have supplied a family for a week at Uphill, and dropped it into the boiling water, as he raised the kettle from the fire, and then gravely placed two small straight sticks crossways on the top, saying, "That's the way to make tea draw."

"Where's the sugar, mate?" said Bullet.

"Stop," replied old Hogan, "stop a bit,

let the leaves sink first, or you'll spoil it all."

Dipping his hand into another bag, he brought out a handful of sugar, which he added to the tea, stirring it up with a dead stick, which he picked from the heap the boys had gathered. "There's a spoon for you," said he to Edward.

Meanwhile, Bullet produced from the dray a great flat cake called a damper, and some salt beef. The pannikins were soon filled with the hot, sweet tea, and the boys fell to, and thoroughly relished their first Australian supper.

Beside his master, with raised ears and wistful glance, whilst his beautiful bushy tail impatiently brushed the sand, old Jock, the sheep dog, waited for and received from each the bones of the banquet. The stars were now out in the sky, not small and

dim as they are in our northern clime, but shining like plates of silver. The sheep were ringed up round the fire, whilst Hogan and Bullet arranged for the night watch. At the old shepherd's recommendation the boys took off their boots, tied a handkerchief over their heads to keep the moonlight from their eyes, rolled themselves in their blankets with their feet to the fire, and soon fell into a profound slumber. The last thing which Edward saw and heard, was the glowing light from Bullet's pipe, as he gathered the embers close to the back log, and the angry growl of the faithful Jock, and the rush of the sheep, as some bandycoot or rat, in its evening gambols, disturbed the flock in its repose.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ringing notes of the coconyella, or the laughing jackass, filling the wood with his merry voice, the crack of Bullet's whip in the distance, the bark of Jock as he ringed up the sheep round the camp, and the sight of old Hogan placing the kettle on the fire; such were the sights and sounds which ushered in the first morning in Australia.

Little protection during the night does the scanty foliage (if it may be so called) of the Australian trees afford, and Edward putting

his hand on his blanket found it soaked with dew.

In obedience to old Hogan, the boys rolled up their rugs, and packed them on the dray. Bullet, wet to the knees from his ramble through the scrubby bush, now appeared driving his charge of six bullocks, which he had tracked with unerring instinct and brought back to the camp. It was a strange sight for the English boys to see how the driver compelled these huge wild creatures to obey his commands.

Selecting the leaders, Bonny and Strawberry, placing one iron bow round his own neck, and holding the other with the heavy wooden yoke in his hand, he approached them, and leaning over them as they stood with downcast heads, he fixed the iron bows round their necks and secured them with

the key. Meanwhile Edward and Jem had kept the others from straying; these, now under the awful threats which Bullet uttered with his powerful voice, and in terror of his tremendous whip, fell into their well-known places. The whole team was backed so dexterously as to bring the pole of the dray between the two hindmost bullocks, and with such exactness that it ran through the large iron ring which they bore on their yoke. Breakfast over, they started, Bullet leading with his drag, and guiding his team with his voice and with his whip, through the trees and over the fallen logs, whilst Hogan, the boys and old Jock, followed with the sheep.

It was grey dawn and chilly when they started, but the change from night to day was rapid. The red, unclouded sun appeared above the trees, and the boys felt

his first rays strike their hands and faces like fire, and were soon glad to hang their jackets on the dray. Higher and higher rose the sun, fiercer and fiercer grew the heat, and the dust flung up by the feet of the sheep, clung to their perspiring faces. Innumerable flies attacked the corners of their eyes, and, as they slapped their faces with their grimy hands in vain attempts to drive away these active and unwearied pests, they soon presented an appearance very different from that of the smart and tidy lads who had landed only yesterday from the *Blackwall.*

"Hallo, Ned!" exclaimed Jem, "you be turned black fellow already. I suppose we shall get as black as Bullet if we stop here any time."

"I wish I were near the pump at Uphill," answered Edward; "I am choking with

thirst, I'd give something for a drink of water."

Poor Jock seemed to be in the same distress, his red tongue hung from his mouth, his brave and gallant bark was heard less frequently as he moved languidly behind the sheep; they, too, kept their heads down and stamped and crowded together to avoid the flies and the glare of the sun. Gladly they all saw, about noon, Bullet stop, and taking the chains off the bullocks, dismiss them, still yoked in couples, to feed amongst some rushes, whilst he, flinging himself down on the ground, drank from a little pond or water-hole as bushmen call it. The boys hastened to follow his example, but Jock had been first of all, and there he was sitting up to his neck in water and lapping greedily.

"Come, mate," said Bullet to the dog; "get out of that, don't be spoiling our tea. Here's enough water to drink, but none for washing. You are a gentleman sheep-dog, you are too fine for us. You want to wash, do you? You will want soap and a razor to shave next, I suppose? Get out, you old vagabond!"

Jem, only too ready to attack an animal, picked up a stick and struck the bushy tail which was quickly swishing into mud the shallow treasure of the water; with a suppressed growl and with fiery eyes Jock leapt out and confronted the boy, warning him as plainly as dog could speak, not to do that again, or he would find out who was master.

"Ah, my lad," said Bullet; "let the dog alone, or he will soon make you stand off the grass."

"None of that, young fellow," at the same time called out old Hogan. "Old Jock wont let me touch him, and what's more, he won't let any one touch me. I was once larking with a black fellow, and when he raised his waddy, gammoning to strike me, Jock flew at him, and would have pulled him down if I had not called him off."

The heat was now intense, every leaf in the trees shone like silver in the bright glare. Bullet stretched himself on the sand to sleep, old Hogan, lighting his pipe, seemed about to follow his example.

"Won't the sheep stray?" said Edward.

"Stray," repeated Hogan; "all the police in Melbourne would not move them!" and, indeed, they had gathered under the scanty shade of two or three trees, with their heads down in the sand,

feeling the combined oppression of the heat and the flies.

The sun was sinking when the crack of Bullet's whip aroused the party, and once more they set on through the endless forest. On the fourth day Edward began to be sensible of a change in the appearance of the country. The track led along the foot of a lofty range of hills covered with wood to the summit, but the trees immediately round them were not so close together, and the country wore a richer and more open appearance. The sheep spread wider through the forest, reminding Edward of the flocks on the downs at Uphill.

"What's up?" exclaimed Jem, as the flock scampered about in all directions, whilst Jock, regardless of duty and propriety, added to the confusion by dashing at head-

long speed through the midst of them. A large herd of kangaroo came bounding through the wood, crashing through the scrub, breaking the branches of the fallen trees in their headlong rush to regain the safety of the mountain side.

"That's a fine old man," said Hogan, pointing to one of the last of the troop, as the weird and singular creature bounded past.

"Yes," answered Bullet; "and if we had had master's white Fly here, we could have had kangaroo tail soup for supper to-night."

Old Jock soon came back from his fruitless chase, and whilst Hogan collected the sheep in the order of march, Bullet twisted up the remainder of Mr. Cameron's silk handkerchief into a

cracker, and heralded the approach to Boniong, which was now near, with a succession of thundering reports, making the forest ring again.

CHAPTER XIV.

Two white cottages with two or three sheds thatched with bark, in the midst of a rolling plain, with here and there a mimosa and myrtle tree growing, such was the first glimpse of Boniong; and as Edward gazed wistfully at it, he felt his heart warm to his new home. After the solitude and unbroken silence of the forest, the sights and sounds of life about them, made them almost fancy they were approaching a village.

"That's the master's hut," said old

Hogan; "here lies our way;" as, leaving the sheep to feed, they drew near to the smaller of the two cottages and were pleasantly welcomed by some dozen dogs of all sorts and sizes. Still more pleasant was the sight of the hut-keeper coming to the door with a frying-pan in which a number of chops, deliciously browned, poppled and frizzled; and more pleasant still was the smell of the abundant and delicious supper.

"I heard Bullet's signals of distress," said William Cliff, as the hut-keeper was called; "and guessed you would be pretty raw; there's some salt for you in that shell, and there's some potatoes, the like of which you won't see between this and Melbourne. Here, young man, take two or three more chops whilst I make a pancake."

No second invitation was needed, and

as soon as the frying-pan was empty, William poured into the hot sea of melted fat some flour and water, craftily mingled with a little sugar, and soon put before them a pancake, which left them, as far as supper was concerned, nothing to desire.

The chorus of the dogs, and the trampling of horses' feet, told of a fresh arrival.

"Now, lads," said old Hogan, "there's the master, rouse out."

"Ah," said Mr. Cameron, as he galloped up to the hut, "I saw by the bullock tracks that you were ahead. How did you get on with the journey? Down, Fly, down, Kennet," he added, as the tall kangaroo greyhound, standing up and placing his paws on his shoulders, endeavoured to lick his face. "Here, take the saddle off, Edward."

"Please, sir, where is the stable?"

Bullet burst into a loud laugh; and Mr. Cameron, pointing to the plain, said:

"There is the stable, my boy, and a pretty big one too; and there are my other horses;" and he pointed to a group feeding by the edge of the swamp. "Leave Billy alone, he will make himself at home and find his food."

The horse, freed from the saddle and bridle, first selected a smooth place, and then bending his legs settled himself down for a good, comfortable roll, kicking his heels in the air and snorting as the dust tickled his nostrils; then rising again gave himself a good shake, and like one now at home and refreshed, went off to join his companions and to pick up his supper too.

"William," said Mr. Cameron, "you must knock up a berth for these two lads. I shall want them to go with me after the cattle in the morning," and he turned and went to the larger and more pretentious of the two cottages, which he kept for use of himself and his friends.

"There rings the farmer's clock," exclaimed old Hogan, as the loud cry of the coconyella was heard again. "It is time to put the sheep in the hurdles; come along, lads."

There was no need to tell old Jock to follow. The sheep were soon shut in the hurdles, where they were watched by William, who slept in a little movable tenement made of split wood, and also by the faithful Jock, who walked proudly among his mongrel companions, bestowing an angry growl as some of the younger

members of the society presumed in attentions which were more free than suitable to his age and dignity.

"What a lot of dogs," Edward could not help remarking.

"Yes," answered the shepherd, "there's Smut, and Spring, and Rattler, and Smoker, and Fly, and Grog," pointing them out one by one.

"But," said Jem, "what are those marks? Fly has got a cut all down the forehead, and Smoker has a terrible long wound on the flank, and that big brindle dog you call Rattler, he has got ever so many marks over his chest and on his flank."

"Ah," replied Hogan, "they are all old warriors, they are. They have been in many a fight with the kangaroo, Spring and Fly are the ones to set them up—Kennet and Rattler are the boys to pull

them down. They are the lads to sound his ribs, I can tell you."

They now returned to the hut; Bullet brought in a heavy back log which he placed in the huge chimney built of turf, and as it was now dark, he lit a wick, composed of rag, which stood in a small tin pot into which some grease had been poured. This was their lamp. The lads now began to take notice of their new abode. A large iron pot, a frying-pan, some pannikins brightly scoured in the ashes, and two or three guns made up the furniture. To this must be added three or four stools and a table. Round the slabs which composed the wall, ranged the bedsteads, made of rough posts driven into the ground and supporting the cross-pieces on which, protected from the rude timber by some dried grass, the blankets

and rugs were spread. The earthen floor was well swept, and Edward was surprised to see Hogan drenching it with boiling water from the iron pot.

"What is that for?" said he.

"What were you scratching your legs for, just now?" answered the shep herd.

"Why," replied Jem, "I think I felt a flea or two."

"Aye, and you would feel a good many if I did not keep the place clean. When I came here first, there were more fleas in this hut than there were sheep in the fold by long chalks; and," continued Hogan, "I will tell you how I killed them. I got some dried grass out of the swamp and spread it lightly over the floor and then set light to it at one end and let it burn across. You should have heard the fleas

pop as they leapt up into the fire, it was like the battle of Waterloo."

The party were now seated round the fire gazing at the burning logs, in a happy state of rest after their long journey, whilst the lads were answering the questions of the old shepherd about the "old country" as he called it; when a long-drawn, loud, melancholy yell startled them. At the same time two or three of the dogs bounded out like mad things from the open door, and the whole pack, dashing out into the darkness, the noise of their scampering feet sounded like the noise of a troop of horse. The air was filled with mingled yells and with the barking of the dogs, amidst which the lordly tones of Jock's deep and angry voice were plainly heard.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Jem,

with a pale and frightened face, "is it the wild blacks?"

As Hogan mechanically laid his hands upon the gun:

"Blacks?" he said; "no, it's the dingo;" and standing at the door he shouted out: "Hold him, Rattler! hold him, boys!"

A bright flash from the watchman's box and the report of William's gun, was answered by Hogan discharging his piece. To this was added the report of Mr Cameron's rifle, and when the echoes had died away on the hills, all was still. The voice of old Jock, however, was occasionally heard as he harassed the retreating enemy.

Profound silence at length reigned through the bush, broken only by the distant and awful roll of the long seas as

they broke in muttered thunder on the rocks of the south coast some four miles distant. The boys stretched themselves on their welcome beds and slept the sleep of the weary.

CHAPTER XV.

"HOWEVER shall we find the horses for master?" said Edward the next morning, as with the kettle which Hogan had given him, he left the hut to go down to the waterhole.

"Never you mind, lad," said the old shepherd. "Bullet will find them if they are above ground. These blacks read the ground just as you read a book. Wherever a horse or a beast puts his foot, they can follow him if it were for a hundred miles. Run down that track; you will find

the waterhole amongst the long grass in the swamp, and bring back a kettle full; quick sticks. Here come William and Jock from the watch-box. Look sharp!"

Edward ran down the winding path and quickly found the waterhole. The sun was above the trees and the morning was already warm, and Edward, heated from yesterday's fatigue, was about to fling himself down as he had seen Bullet do, and take a drink of the water which looked so cool and clear. Already his hands had rested on the edge of the little pool, which was not above three or four feet wide, and his face was almost touching it, when a movement of something on the opposite side riveted his attention. Three or four high tussocks of grass, resembling sheaves of wheat, fringed the margin of the waterhole, and

close to his face he saw a long dark line hanging down from the festoon of swamp grass. He realised the fact that the dark line was the body of a huge snake. Its tail was wreathed in the tussocks of grass above, whilst its neck floated on the clear water, supporting its broad and fierce-looking head, terrible with its keen and fiery eyes set in a bar of pale yellow.

Flinging down the kettle, Edward was racing at full speed back to the men's huts when the ringing voice of Mr. Cameron :

"What's the matter, Ford?" arrested him; and almost breathless, he cried out: "A snake, sir, a great snake in the water."

"All right," answered Mr. Cameron; "tell him to stop a bit," and looking round, apparently in vain, for a stick, he rapidly

entered his hut and returned with a bright and curved cutlass in his hand.

"Keep away the dogs," shouted he to old Hogan; "come along, boys, never let a snake go. Black, yellow, or carpet, kill him. Mr. Moreton told you there is enmity between them and man, and that is fulfilled in Australia, at any rate; come on quietly, lads, quietly, let's watch the gentleman at his play. Keep back the dogs, Hogan; old Jock is sure to go at him if he sees him."

Stealthily, and crouching down, they approached the spot, Mr. Cameron first, with his cutlass, and the boys close behind him. As soon as they could command a view of the little pond, they saw that its surface was agitated by some movement. The subtle creature had relaxed his hold on the grass and was now swimming carrying his

head gracefully above the surface. Whilst they were watching a small moth came flitting across the rushes of the swamp and as, in its sidelong flight, it was wafted some two feet above the water, as quick as thought the snake shot up like an arrow from a bow, and caught it in his open jaws. At this singular and unwonted sight the boys raised an involuntary cry, and the irrepressible dogs, who now appeared on the scene, alarmed the vigilant reptile, who endeavoured at once to regain the thick tussocks of grass. It was then that Mr. Cameron, with a bound, swung the flashing cutlass down upon the tussock, amongst which the glistening body was seen to wind. Then followed a scene of the greatest confusion. The blows were redoubled on the now writhing snake, and the dogs were with difficulty kept away

from the dying, but venomous and infuriated creature.

"If it were not for this grass," said Mr. Cameron, "I should soon have finished him off; a stick as big as a tobacco pipe will break a snake's back if you can get at him."

All was over now; dragging him by the tail, Mr. Cameron drew the snake out to some clear ground, and pronounced him to be nearly six feet in length.

"There, boys, you've been in at the death now, you will see plenty more, for the limestone rocks of Boniong swarm with them."

"Would he have killed me, sir, if he had bit me?" asked Edward.

"Yes," answered his master; "but this is a black snake, which the natives call a very good fellow, because you would take

two hours to die; whereas, if bitten by the carpet snake, you would die in half an hour. Now, there is Bullet and the horses, get your breakfasts, and be ready to start."

The rule in Australia is first to catch your horse before you can ride him, and when the boys with Mr. Cameron climbed over the logs of the stock-yard, Edward with amazement beheld the horses galloping round and then crowding together, but always turning their heels to the man who approached them bridle in hand.

"Wo, my rowdy cherry pickers," said Bullet, as he flung his long, lithe body over the stock-yard rails, and dashing between Mr. Cameron's horse and the others separated him from the mob, when he at once stood perfectly quiet, and submitted to be bridled.

"This is your horse, Edward," said his

master; his name is Billy Button, the most noted buck jumper in the colony, but I know you will use him kindly. Keep your spurs out of him at first. Billy treats those well who treat him well. Jem, that's your horse, Blunderbuss, that big brown; it's time we were off; we must find a bullock to kill for the cattle station before night."

Joyfully Edward put his feet into the stirrups, oh! how different from the polished steel in the harness room at Uphill, and felt with delight the strong little horse moving beneath him. They dashed off at a canter through the woods, avoiding the boughs of the trees under which they passed, now by swerving their horses, now their own heads, and sometimes bending down even to the saddle, Mr. Cameron gaily singing as he cantered on, and carry-

ing, coiled up in his right hand, a tremendous whip with a short handle of about sixteen inches, and a long lash of about fourteen feet. About four miles unbroken speed brought them to the confines of the cattle run.

"Hark," said Mr. Cameron, as the crack of a whip was heard, "that's Micky Free, he has got the bullock we wanted; now, boys, keep him in the direction you see we want to drive him, and stick to me or Micky; if you lose us, trust your horses, they will take you back again to Boniong."

And now came a trial of strength. The great bullock which Micky had separated from the herd, with two or three others to keep him company, endeavoured to break from them, dashing through the trees at a terrific pace; the bushmen met him at

each turn, and the report of their tremendous whips rang through the woods, accompanied by the sharp stern tones of their voices. Through the thick timber, leaping the fallen logs, down gullies, through scrub, at headlong speed they went. Suddenly before them appeared the stock-yard of the cattle station; the whips cracked with redoubled fury; and wearied and subdued the bullock was driven in and the rails put up and pegged.

"Well done, my lads," said Mr. Cameron, as they turned their heads homewards. "Ned, I shall make a bushman of you, I can see. You headed him well that time he turned in the gully."

"Billy Button knew what to do, better than I did, sir," replied Edward, pleased at his master's commendation.

Merrily they cantered back, and the sight of the smoke rising from the hut chimneys at Boniong, was already to the new landed lads a sight of home.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Go on and head those cattle," said Mr. Cameron one day to Edward, who was riding beside him on Billy Button, who had now become his friend and companion. As Edward struck Billy with the spurs and dashed on through the scrub, Mr. Cameron remarked to Micky Free, the stockman :

"That lad rides well for a new hand."

"Yes, sir," answered Micky ; "and Billy has never thrown him yet. I never knew a man that could sit on his back

when he chose to put him off. He can throw his rider, and then fling his saddle off too, if he is so minded; but that youngster has got a kind way about him, and he knows the horse, and the horse knows him. I wish I could say as much for the other lad. Old Blunder flung him the other day."

Edward had now headed the cattle round, and joined his master and the stockman. He had learnt, during his short experience, to guide Billy Button through the timber, and to jump him over the fallen trees, and more than all, he had learnt to use the stockwhip which Micky Free the kind-hearted Irish stock-keeper, "jist to encourage the spalpeen," as he said, had given him. He had also learnt to find his way through the bush, in which two things greatly helped him, one was his

own shadow, which shewed him the position of the sun, and, consequently, somewhat the direction of his home; the other was the unfailing sagacity of his little horse, who was always ready to turn home to get his saddle off. It was some time, however, before Edward could make up his mind that he had got the other side of the sun, and that he must look north for it, instead of south, as he had done at Uphill. Without much fear, therefore, of losing his way, he heard Mr. Cameron tell him to ride on round the swamp, keeping the sun on his left shoulder, until he came to the Chiock hills, and see if he could find the two mares and foals which had strayed away from the station.

Proud of the charge, Edward cantered on, enjoying the smell of the peppermint trees, and the gums, and the bitter-leaf or

native hop, and sending Billy Button now and again over a fallen log to keep his jumping powers in order. He was soon out of the country which was familiar to him, but journeyed steadily on through the wood, keeping the sun upon his left shoulder, and at length a light through the trees showed that he was approaching the bay. Here, in obedience to his directions, he turned and began to retrace his steps towards Boniong, only on the other side of the swamp, which was in some parts a mile wide. A cattle track ran along its edge, and he almost shuddered more than once as he saw the snakes, alarmed at the sound of his horse's feet, come down the bank and scurry away. Following the edge of the swamp and straining his eyes, still for the snakes, not in fear for himself but for his beloved

Billy Button, he came upon the tracks of sheep and knew that he was on the feeding ground of a neighbouring settler. Presently Billy pricked up his ears as the mingled sound of the barking of dogs came faintly from the distance. Edward at once pushed on in the direction of the noise; still it seemed a long way off, and impatiently he put Billy to a hand gallop. As he turned the base of one of the little hills a sight met his view which made him stop in amazement.

In a ragged and not over clean shirt, with a pitchfork in his hand, with staring eyes, a red face and frightened look, stood Paddy the shepherd boy belonging to Mr. Cameron's neighbour.

"What's the matter, Paddy? Where are the sheep? and where are the dogs? What are you doing with a pitchfork?"

"What's the matter?" answered the lad. Why, haven't I been fighting a monster kangaroo all the day, and there he sits a-top of that hill, and there's the dogs a sitting round him, and there's the sheep down in the swamp, and whatever will I do? The dogs won't leave him at all."

"Come, show me where he is," said Edward, jumping off his horse and leaving him to feed, having so arranged the bridle that Billy should not entangle his feet in it.

"Don't you go near him at all," exclaimed Paddy; "the dogs have been worrying him, until he is nigh mad with rage. Sure, he'll kill us all if you vex him any more, and the dogs is quite tired out. There he sits," he added, pointing to the top of a high conical hill. And there, indeed, showing weird and strangely terrible

against the sky stood the tall kangaroo. Now, he would rear himself up to his full height, dropping his arms down by his sides, then he would bend forward as if meditating an attack upon the dogs. They, lying on the ground with their red tongues hanging from their mouths, now and then uttered a feeble and broken bark from their dry throats as if saying: "We're tired, but we'll have you yet."

Edward made up his mind what to do.

"Give me the prong," said he to Paddy.

"Oh, murder!" replied the boy. "You'll be killed entirely, don't go near the beast. Wait till I get up a tree. Sure he can't climb at all. I'll be safe, any how."

Edward, taking the pitchfork, began to advance up the hill, expecting that the creature would fly at his approach, as he had often seen them fly from him when

riding in the bush. The dogs, welcoming the sight of a new ally, raised again their bark which they had discontinued from mere weariness, and recommenced the attack. Slowly and bravely Edward went on, and was now within about fifteen yards of the animal, which seemed to notice his approach. Suddenly bending down, with one spring, the kangaroo cleared the dogs, and bounding again, came headlong down the steep hill straight at the lad. Edward at once levelled the pitchfork, and fair and true, took the animal on the breast. What passed exactly no one could tell, he felt the handle of the prong driven right through his grasp, and then a heavy blow upon the shoulder, which flung him violently down the hill. Half stunned, he turned and saw the kangaroo still bound-

ing on, with the pitchfork sticking in its side. By him, pell-mell, on pressed the dogs, now encouraged by the flight of their late antagonist, and it was clear that the battle was nearly over. Paddy came down from the tree, and as Edward recovered his senses, he saw the dogs pull down his enemy.

"Whatever brought you here?" said Paddy. "Oh, but I'm glad to see you; will you come to the hut and have some tea?"

"Why," answered Edward, "I have been looking for our two mares and foals."

"Is it the roan and the black mare you mean? They were there at the end of the flat half an hour ago."

Edward regained the saddle somewhat shaken, and with his red shirt torn, for the kangaroo had clawed him sharply on the

shoulder as he passed. He rode on, saw the horses, started them with a crack of his whip towards home, and as he took the bridle off Billy Button and went in for his supper, he remarked to himself: "I've heard it said, 'All's well that ends well.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

VISITORS were rare, but very welcome at Boniong. The boys gladly fell in with the hospitable ways of the country, and as soon as ever a stranger was seen, the kettle was put on, whether he was to be an inmate of the men's hut, as it was called, or of Mr. Cameron's. Often they would sit, far into the night, listening to tales of travel and wild adventure, and many were the stories which they heard of fights with blacks and bushrangers. They were reassured, however, by learning

that the tribe amongst which they lived, was, and had always been, friendly with the whites.

One of the accomplishments of a bushman is to use the axe well; and Edward was one morning trying his strength on a big log which he was cutting up for the fire, when suddenly the dogs who were lying around him expressed by their pricked up ears and uneasy motions the approach of something unusual. Presently a long, soft, shrill cry was heard in the direction of the track which led to the hut. Fly and Rattler uttered a sound something between a bark and a howl, snuffed the air, and wheeled round as if prepared to meet some danger. Edward strained his eyes and endeavoured to pierce the obscurity of the wood on the edge of the plain. He called Jem, and, shading their

eyes with their hands, they presently saw with beating hearts some dusky forms coming along the road, whilst others appeared here and there amongst the trees. Some of the tallest seemed to carry long wooden spears, these were the men; others, the women, bore bulky burdens on their stooping shoulders.

What was to be done? Bullet was away with the dray to fetch some timber; Hogan was with the sheep; William had been sent to the cattle station; Mr. Cameron would not be home till twelve o'clock; the lads were alone. Jem grew pale with fright, and spoke about running away.

"I shall not run," said Edward; "master left us in charge, and I shall stop whatever comes of it; besides, Hogan said the blacks here were friendly, so they won't hurt us."

There was no time for more words. From all sides naked men, loaded with wooden weapons, with different sorts of spears, some of them ten feet long and jagged with glass at the points; with narrow shields painted in red and white, with curious crooked clubs, now surrounded the amazed youths. Nothing, however, could be more friendly than their manner; they laughed, shewing their white teeth; and, somewhat to Edward's disgust, began to place their hands on him in a way something between the fondling of a man and the pawing of a dog, and as the said hands were begrimed with blood and filth, he found such caresses rather more friendly than agreeable.

He answered their repeated questions: "Name you?" "Where Bill?" again and again, and it was with inexpressible

joy that he heard a tall warrior speaking in his own language and pointing, not with his hand but with his protruding lips towards the swamp, say :

"Wha Misser Cameron ?"

Glad was Edward to see Mr. Cameron returning at a gallop. In a minute he was in the midst of them; some caressed his horse, some made a graceful imitation of a white man's bow, and then one and all began to importune him for "bread," "bacca," "tea." The huge warrior who had first attracted Edward's attention, taking his pipe from his thick, close curly hair, in which it had rested, thrust his finger into the bowl to shew that it was empty, and repeated his request for "bacca" with redoubled emphasis.

By this time some sixty or seventy of the natives had come up, and as, wearied

with their morning's march, they gladly divested themselves of the burdens they had carried, the walls of the hut were quite covered with the singular and motley collection of warlike implements which leaned against them. Being gratified with the present of a little tobacco, like men accustomed to command, they asked for fire to light their pipes.

Some sat cross-legged on the grass, here and there an old man standing on one foot with the other drawn up so that it rested mid-way on the thigh of the leg on which he balanced himself, whilst he steadied his body by leaning on his long lance which he grasped with both hands, would issue in loud and strange tones orders now to his mangy and miserable dogs, now to the other members of his party far away in the bush.

Meantime the women were building their houses (if we may so call them) on the hill which rose on the other side of the swamp, close to the water-hole where Mr. Cameron had killed the snake; and soon the smoke of fifty fires was seen rising in the clear air. Edward saw some of the men with their little axes stripping the bark from the trees with wonderful dexterity; but what was his astonishment when he beheld one lithe and active warrior walk up a tree by cutting a notch at each step into which he inserted his great toe, thus changing the tree into a sort of staircase, and although the incision which he made with his little axe was only about an inch deep, he actually ascended, talking and laughing all the time with his comrades who stood or sat below.

The bark, when stripped, was leant

against a pole supported by two little forks driven into the ground; and this, with a few green boughs and a little dry grass from the swamp, completed the building of each "miah-miah" as the natives call their huts. As evening fell, the little hill was lighted over with their fires, and the loud voices of the men and the almost equally loud voices of the women, shewed that the politics or private quarrels of the camp were under discussion.

"What would they think of this at home?" said Jém to his companion.

Before Edward could answer, Mr. Cameron called out to him:

"Come on, lads, there's to be a corrobory to-night, and perhaps a fight. Come with me to the camp."

As they drew near, the dark forms

moving about, appearing and disappearing as they crossed the light of the fires, the loud and imperious voices, the long lances stuck in the ground in front of each "miah-miah," all seemed to them strange and wonderful.

The lads crept up to Mr. Cameron as they beheld, close to them, the tall warrior with whom Edward had already made acquaintance. His face was now painted with bars of white, his ribs marked out with chalk lines, and two ribbon-like stripes of chalk were drawn down his legs; his ancles were bound round with bunches of green leaves, and in his hand he carried his painted shield and curved boomerang. The weird figure grinned at Mr. Cameron and glided away into the darkness.

By the side of a blazing fire, in the

midst of the camp, were seated about a dozen of the women with their opossum skins, folded up like a lady's muff, on their knees. A grey old man, striking two sticks together and singing a monotonous chant in a loud voice, now stood forth, and the ball commenced. The women beat their folded cloaks with their hollow hands, keeping time with the chant and with the old man's sticks, so that the forest rang again. Then from out the trees advanced, crouching and bounding, the men, painted as I have described ; and as the white lines shewed in the light of the fire, whilst their dusky bodies were in obscurity, they looked like a company of skeletons.

As the chant went on, and the time quickened, they came nearer and nearer to the fire, and produced a ghastly and unearthly spectacle ; then clashing their

boomerangs and shields together in exact time, while the opossum cloaks gave forth a sound like so many drums, they raised a long, shrill, fearful war-whoop and disappeared back again behind the curtain of the darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Of all the duties which he undertook, Edward least liked that of shepherding. He enjoyed riding after the cattle, felling trees, and splitting the trunks with the mall and wedges; he had learnt to track the horses, not quite so well as the black fellows, certainly, but in a way that would have astonished his friends at Uphill; he had even, under Bullet's direction, learnt to drive the team of six bullocks through the bush, and he revelled in all these accomplishments; but the life of an

Australian shepherd is, or rather was at that time a very lonely one. The days seemed so long whilst he watched the shadows of the trees, by which he had learnt to calculate the time of day. But occasionally this duty fell to his lot, more especially at shearing time.

More than once he had to report the sudden death of some of the flock; whilst watching the sheep feeding amongst the trees, he would sometimes see them start back through fright, and then he would notice one shaking its head and ears, then presently become dull and stupid, then lie down upon its side and die. A slight swelling about the jaws was the only sign that he could find of injury, but the cause of this was soon revealed.

One day, he saw a long brown snake winding away through the grass, in the

midst of the startled flock, and seeking the covert which it found in a hollow log. Many a time his heart beat wildly as he encountered one of these active and deadly creatures. It was an appalling sight to see them, when attacked, raise their heads some three feet from the ground, whilst, with open mouth and forked and quivering tongue and fiery eyes, they dared him to come on. The brown snakes were especially fierce, they would puff out their necks, till they made a sort of frill round their throat, and do battle so viciously, that no one, not even the most active, could come with any safety within eight or ten feet of the enraged reptile.

Edward's plan of attack was to arm himself with some short thick sticks, which he hurled at a safe distance, whilst the

snake, still carrying his crest aloft above the grass, and hissing defiance, would endeavour to escape. The first well-aimed missile would place his hitherto unapproachable enemy at his mercy, for a slight blow will dislocate the back of a snake, and then with a long sapling he would thrash to death his angry and writhing antagonist. Gentle and kind to everything else, like a true bushman, Edward never spared the snakes, and if a thought of mercy crossed his mind, he remembered that St. Paul himself had shaken the venomous viper into the fire at Malta. There was one who was his companion, who seemed animated by the same feelings as himself. No sooner did Jock catch sight of a snake, than, bristling up his back, he would run round and round, barking and provoking the contest. Although

Edward would rush eagerly to the fight, he was not always quick enough to anticipate the attack of his fourfooted and more active ally. Old Hogan said that Jock had killed, to his certain knowledge, above fifty of these animals; how it was that he escaped unharmed it would be hard to say, but hitherto he had escaped. Two of the young kangaroo dogs had been struck when running down to drink in the swamp, one of them a snow-white, beautiful creature had died in about ten minutes, but the kangaroo dogs are of the greyhound breed and smooth skinned, whilst Jock was protected by a coat of shaggy hair which may have saved him. Moreover, if the snake was wary and quick and active, Jock seemed fully alive to his danger, and was quick and active too. As long as the head of the beast was pointed

towards him the dog would maintain his distance, and wait till it was terrified into flight by his continued bark, then, with one bound, he would leap upon it, and, catching it by the body, would shake it violently as one would shake a whip lash, and toss it from him with every joint dislocated. At times he would vary his amusement by hunting a bandycoot or a bush rat.

One day, the sheep driven to the shelter of two or three shady trees were resting, or, as it is called, camping at noon.

Edward had sunk into a half-doze with his head resting on a log and watching some lowries with their scarlet bodies and bright blue wings, as they flitted about the water hole where they had come to drink, and was dreamily comparing them with the brown starlings and speckled thrushes of his old

home, when he was roused by Jock's well-known bark. Starting up with his gun in his hand he was quickly on the spot, and saw, with anxiety, his faithful and valued friend bounding in his usual manner round a small snake different from any he had ever seen before, being of a dull yellow colour, but apparently very lithe and active. Eagerly looking round for a stick to hurl, he was vexed to see that there was not one within his reach. Throwing down his gun, he strove with frantic haste to break off a limb from a fallen tree; in vain, the tough limb withstood his utmost efforts; a sharp whine made him turn his eyes to the conflict, and he saw the snake stealing rapidly away through the grass and over the logs, whilst Jock, for once, seemed unable or unwilling to follow; instead of that, the dog turned round and

round, shaking his head and his long silky ears with an expression of violent pain. The day, as I said, was very hot ,and Jock's tongue had hung out from his mouth during the fight. "Is he bitten?" was Edward's thought. "Is he bitten?" said he aloud. "Jock, Jock," he called loudly; "come here, what is the matter?"

For the first time, the dog did not heed the voice he had always been so ready to obey, but still continued shaking his head, but more slowly, and then made as if he would go in the direction of the hut, perhaps in search of water to quench what was indeed his death thirst. He did not, however, go many yards, but sank down upon the ground, stretching himself out to his full length, whilst his dark brown eyes became filmed and glassy. Edward hung over him in despair, and wiped, with

his rough hands, the tears which fell upon his dying friend. A few convulsive movements of the limbs, and all was over. Jock, the most faithful, the most trusty of servants, had fought his last battle.

"Oh, what will master, what will Hogan say?" said Edward, as, discharging his gun, to scare away the wild dogs, he sped with breathless steps to bring the sad news to the station.

"Well, Edward," said Mr. Cameron, "it was no fault of yours. I never knew a snake-killing dog that escaped in the long run yet. I shall miss poor Jock by day, and his honest bark by night; and I hope we may all be able to say, when our time comes, that we have done our duty as well as he did his.

They buried him in a shady spot near

the huts, and in the words of an old bush song:

"The tall gum trees shadow the sheep-dog's last home."

CHAPTER XIX.

AUSTRALIA is the land of story-telling, or rather "spinning yarns," as they call it. Bullet used to sleep by himself in the cart-shed; he was the only surviving member of a tribe of Sydney blacks called the Moucalembeet. For some years he had entirely attached himself to the white man, and made a good servant. Two of the same tribe named Old Bull and Pigeon, who had accompanied him were now dead. Old Bull had died from age, Pigeon's end was a tragic one. A vessel had sunk in

Melbourne harbour, and Pigeon, a magnificent diver, had been engaged in endeavouring to get up some of the valuable cargo. It is supposed that whilst thus employed in the hold of the vessel deep under water, a cask, loosened by his efforts, floated up and stopped the gangway, and that he was thus shut in below; at any rate he never returned.

Bullet was thus left alone; he never talked about his tribe, nor about byegone days. He seemed to have no idea of a Supreme Being, or of religion of any sort. Had he been taught when he was young, he would doubtless have been different, but it is very very hard, in some cases I believe impossible, to teach a full-grown Australian savage the meaning of Christianity.

Thus old Hogan and the young men

were the only tenants of the men's hut, except when strangers came, and their talk would often revert to the old country and Hogan's early days.

He had been convicted of some crime, he never would say exactly what, and served his time of fifteen years in the penal settlement in Tasmania, and although he would say little about himself, he had many a tale to tell of his wild and wicked companions with whom he had served his time, and of his masters, sometimes kind and thoughtful, and sometimes hard and cruel. He often spoke of the terrible floggings to which his comrades had been subjected.

"Well, I suppose, after a man had once undergone that dreadful punishment," said Edward, "he would be very cautious of getting it again."

"As to that," replied Hogan, "I never was flogged myself, but they tell me the first blow of the cat is like a quart of scalding water flung down your naked back; but a man will get accustomed to flogging like a bullock. You have seen Bullet drop it into Punch, the lazy pole bullock, and yet he would not mend his pace for it, and I have known men like Punch. They used to make a boast of the punishment they had received. Two of this sort were once leaving the station where they had finished their time and disputing one with the other, which had received the greatest number of lashes. 'Come,' said one of the men. 'I'll soon settle the matter. Stop till I return,' and going back to the station he committed some misdemeanour for which he received five and twenty strokes from the cat, and then re-

joined his companion, fully satisfied that he had won the victory. It seems to me that a man may harden his back as well as his heart and his heart as well as his back, but," continued the old shepherd, "I see you read every night out of that book. I know the outside of it, but I don't know much of the inside. My mother used to take me to church when I was a little boy. She broke her heart, I believe, when I was sent away. I can't alter now what is gone. If I had minded her words I should not have been here now. So, if you'll read out loud I will listen."

Edward was only too willing to accede to the request, and every night some of the Bible was read.

"I heard," said Edward one evening, "to-day, when I was over at Kanjerong with master, that a clergyman was coming

down this way, and that we were to have church next Sunday. Let's mind we don't forget the day as we did when we were out working and lost our count and Mr. Jamieson's stock; Keeper rode up and found us splitting rails on Sunday morning, and we thought it was Saturday."

"Robinson Crusoe," answered Jem, "managed better."

"Yes," said Ned, "but that's a tale in books, and ours is real life."

"Where's the church to be?"

"Why, in the wool-shed to be sure," replied Edward; "and Mr. Cameron gave me orders to get everything ready there, and to-morrow we must see about it. Master's going to be clerk, and I shall be sexton though there are no bells to pull."

Sunday morning came; the clergyman, escorted by Mr. Cameron and two or

three neighbouring gentlemen, arrived at Boniong. The men came in from the cattle and other stations. The sheep, now no longer guarded by the faithful Jock, were left within sight of Hogan, who, taking his seat by the door, could watch his charge and listen to the service.

About a score of people, finding seats, some on odd bales of wool, some on stools, all at any rate very cleanly washed if not very sumptuously dressed, made up the congregation. The table on which the wool was rolled at shearing time, furnished a desk for the clergyman. There was no singing of hymns, for nobody could sing; but the well known prayers, heard so often at Uphill, brought back past times again, and Edward seemed to see himself in the old church and to hear again the voice of his early and well-remembered friend, Mr.

Moreton. Orderly and quietly the men listened to the service; the quiet being only broken by the arrival of two or three strangers who were late, and who decorously and reverentially put out their pipes before entering and taking a seat. But before the sermon had commenced, the number of the congregation was increased by a company not usually seen in an English church.

Many of the fresh arrivals had been followed by their cattle and sheep dogs, and these at first coiled themselves at the feet of their masters. Meantime the pack at Boniong, missing their owners, strolled in one by one till at last there were nearly as many dogs as men.

The day was very hot, and as the coolest place had been assigned to the clergyman, he was soon surrounded by a spotted

troupe of long-tailed, hairy hounds of every description. Around him were stretched tall, long kangaroo dogs, scarred and marked with wounds, half-bred stag-hounds, bushy-coated sheep dogs, terriers, and every mixture of breed. All behaved very well except Miss Fly, who, in the middle of the sermon, commenced something between a long drawn yawn and a howl, for which being promptly rebuked by the watchful Edward, she turned round three times, and finding a new place to rest in, stretched herself out and behaved with commendable decorum to the end of the service. So passed the Sunday at Boniong.

Christmas tide was now at hand; but oh! the difference between December in Australia and December in England. Instead of the leafless elms, and frost, and snow, the bush was white with the heat;

the grass was so dry that you might break it in your hand. The trees shed their bark, but they kept their leaves all the year round.

But Christmas is Christmas everywhere to English people, and great were the preparations for a feast. Instead of the usual mutton-chops a quarter of lamb was roasted.

"I wish," exclaimed Edward, whilst washing the potatoes, "we had some of the cabbage from Uphill."

"Cabbage!" said William the cook, "you'll find some fine young nettles down in the creek. Take that old pair of shears and cut them; they don't sting this month, you know! they are as good as cabbage and very wholesome. I shall boil them in the pot-liquor with a little salt."

And, indeed, the nettles proved to be

excellent; but the glory of the day was the pudding. Big raisins, and lumps of suet, and plenty of sugar, were mixed up and boiled in the big pot; and when William put before them on the table the lamb, and the potatoes deliciously browned, and the fresh and tender nettles, and then the pudding, mottled with the thick raisins, the lads could not but wish that their friends in the old country could fare as well as they were doing in the new land.

CHAPTER XX.

"GIVE me a drink of tea, for I'm choking," said a stranger, as he entered the hut one hot morning; and, without waiting for an answer, seized on Edward's pannikin and drained it.

"Why, what's up now?" exclaimed old Hogan, rising from the table where they sat at breakfast and filling the stranger's pannikin again.

For a moment or two the visitor remained speechless, evidently through fatigue and excitement. He was dressed

in a red flannel shirt and fustian trousers, very much patched, which bore plain indications of his trade, that of a lime burner, of which there were several companies established on the shore of the bay. Having emptied his second pannikin he found voice to answer :

" Why, what's up ? two of Jack Salter's children were lost yesterday, and we've been out looking for them. I've been in the bush all night and heard your cocks crow this morning, so I made my way across the swamp. If you lads were to get your horses and take a turn in the Shiock hills you might fall in with them, unless the wild dogs have tackled them. The children are very small ; one's about eight and the other nine years old, I think, a boy and girl ; the mother is pretty nigh mad, and the last thing I saw of the father

he was sitting down on a log and staring. He was fairly done up and had coo-eyed his voice away; all he could say was 'Where can they be, Tom? where can they be?'"

Edward had already buckled on the single spur which he owned, Jem held the bridles in his hand, when the tread of a horse was heard and Mr. Cameron looked in at the hut door.

"I met a man on the sands," he said, "as I came along from Kanjerong this morning, who told me about the children. I'll take the road down to the south coast. I have sent Bullet to try if he can hit the tracks; Hogan feeds towards the bay; they might have made on to the sheep run possibly. You and Jem," he continued, "take Billy Button and Blunder and ride to and fro in the Shiock hills

round the limeburners' station. Take a bit of damper in your pockets and a small bottle of water, and don't come back till nightfall unless they are found. If you hear the report of my pistols in the hills make towards me. Cooey as you go, and then stop and listen. Take the dogs with you. I shall have little Smut, the terrier, with me; he is sure to bark if he sees anything."

Edward, who was the best bushman, was soon mounted, and bending forward put Billy to a gallop, followed by Jem on Blunder. Half an hour's riding brought them to the Shiock hills, which were called, from a fancied resemblance, the cups and saucers. Through the hills they rode, keeping within sight of one another and cooeying repeatedly, for the double purpose of frightening away the kangaroo lest the

dogs should be called off to hunt, and also to attract the notice of the children should they be fortunate enough to come near them.

Hours passed; more than once they met parties engaged in the same search as themselves. Their eyes were dazzled and weary from the intensity of their gaze and the blinding glare of the sun; their voices husky and choky from their repeated shouts. The slanting rays of the sun told of the departing day, and their horses shewed signs of their incessant climbing amongst the cups and saucers. The very dogs followed wearily.

"Let's give the horses a spell," said Jem, as he flung himself at full length under the shade of a mimosa.

"Stay," said Edward, "what has Rattler got there down in the long grass on the

flat? there's Fly too, and they are wagging their tails; they would not do that if it was a bandy coot or a snake. Let's go and see first."

As they rode up they saw two or three boughs of sapling mimosa bent over in a sort of arch, and underneath in the shade lay the two children, just awakened from a deep sleep by the caresses of Rattler and Fly, who were attentively licking their faces. Strange to say, though the children had been for thirty hours in the bush, they did not shew great signs of distress; however, they eagerly munched the dry crust of damper and drank the heated water from the bottle which Edward had carried in his pocket.

"Well," exclaimed Jem, "did you ever see anything like this? Look! they made a little house like the black fellow."

"Don't talk," answered Edward, "let's get them home; here, you take the boy up in front of you, and I'll take the girl."

"Do you know the way to the hut?" asked Jem.

"We must go towards the sun, that will bring us to the bay," replied Ned.

The very dogs seemed to know, and went on ahead in the direction which Edward had indicated. From the top of one of the cups they saw the silver bay flashing in the rays of the setting sun, and soon they beheld the smoke of the lime-burners' hut. Proud and happy were the lads as the procession came on, more especially as they saw Mr. Cameron and the parents of the children, who had returned home from their fruitless search.

"Well done, my boys," said Mr. Cameron. "I envy your good luck! where and how did you meet them?"

"Old Rattler ferreted them out," replied Edward, as he recounted the particulars of his adventure.

The mother, as she took the children, spoke little, but her looks said enough. Home was now the word; and Mr. Cameron, leading the way, they cantered on without drawing bridle along the sands and through the bush to Boniong.

"Well, now," said old Hogan, after supper, "I can tell you a couple of yarns about children lost in the bush."

"Let's have them," spoke up Jem.

And so Hogan began:

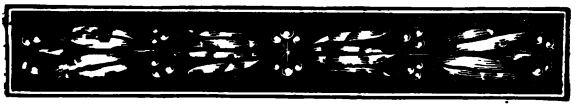
"Once upon the Manera plains a shepherd was minding his flock, and his little daughter was with him. The country

was covered with great blocks of grey rock, and on one of these the shepherd left the little girl sitting whilst the sheep were feeding round, to get a drink of water from the creek at some distance. When he came back the sheep had moved on, and he headed them back with his dog to the place where he thought the child was. The country is all so much alike it is very difficult to mark a place, and he looked in vain for the little girl in the spot where he believed he had left her. Through the wilderness of stones he wandered all that day; night passed, and in the morning he renewed his search, and towards evening found the child sitting upon a rock quite unconcerned, having seemingly dreamt away the time. When he anxiously asked her what she had been doing, she pointed to the stones which lay scattered down the

slope, and said innocently, 'Me mind the sheep, father.'

"The other story has a worse ending. It took place at a cattle station held by a Mr. Wilton who had three little daughters —the eldest, Jenny, about nine years old. She with her two sisters one day strayed from the hut to some distance, gathering wild cherries. The two younger children returned; after awhile a search was made for the elder one. All that the little ones could say was that Jenny was gathering wild cherries. The ground was hard, and though many, both black and white, searched the bush, no traces were ever found of the lost child. Whether she was worried by the wild dogs, or, as was darkly suspected, she fell into the hands of some revengeful natives, or whatever was her end no one can tell. All I know

is, that little Jenny Wilton was never heard of nor seen again since she was seen for the last time by her sisters standing beneath the wild cherry tree."



CHAPTER XXI.

THE blacks with whom Edward had now made friends were frequent visitors at Boniong. They seldom, however, stayed more than a few days. When the green boughs with which their miah-miahs were thatched, withered, they generally went away taking with them their tribe of starved and mangy dogs. Work they would not; they would borrow a gun and ammunition from Mr. Cameron, or track out the horses and the bullocks, but work they seemed to consider not only very un-

pleasant but a degradation. There was one exception to this rule: a quiet, faithful fellow, a Mr. Mann, who had attached himself to the white man from their first arrival. He had discarded the opossum cloak and the spear, and usually wore the shirt and trousers given to him by his white friends. Shoes, however, were an abomination to him. When on horseback (and like all blacks he was very fond of riding) he would hold the stirrup with his great toe.

It was during Mr. Mann's stay at Boniong that Mr. Cameron organised an expedition to explore some country lying at the head of Western Port Bay, and for this purpose had procured a small cedar boat, which he proposed under the guidance of Mr. Mann, to carry on the dray across the ranges which divided the

Melbourne from the Western Port Bay. Mr. Mann's description of the road was not very clear.

"You see," said he, "first day sleep Kanjerong. Another day not big hill; good many plains, by-and-by night. Another one salt water."

Meaning that in two days they could reach the coast on the other side of the hills.

The guns, tea, sugar, blankets, and the boat were loaded on Bullet's dray, not forgetting the little axes, or tomahawks as they are called in the colony, without which no one travels in the bush. Mr. Cameron rode on to Kanjerong, where he purposed leaving his horse, and where the rest of the party were to join him.

The next morning Bullet turned his team into the trackless bush, and guided

by Mr. Mann, who walked ahead with the master, Edward, and Jem, bringing up the rear, they made their way through the thickly wooded hills. Now and then the dray would crash through the head of a fallen tree, and anon where the honeysuckle shrubs stood so thick that it was impossible to avoid them; a way through was rent by the powerful bullocks, and down they would come with a whistling rush torn up by the roots. The party passed some wide waste plains, over which they saw countless flocks of Kangaroo, and more than once the tall and beautiful Emu.

Towards evening they saw Mr. Mann pointing eagerly ahead, and then they heard him cry out:

"You see salt water."

That night they camped on the shore of

the bay. Bullet remained there with his team awaiting their return. Mr. Cameron and the two lads took to the oars, and they steered straight for a desert island about eight miles off. The quiet waters were dotted with flocks of black swans, which Mr. Cameron said were hunted down during the moulting season for the sake of their beautiful skins.

They soon reached the island, where they proposed boiling the kettle. The light cedar-wood boat was drawn up on the beach, and while Mr. Mann was busy lighting the fire, gun in hand, Edward, Jem, and Mr. Cameron started for a short ramble.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Edward, "here's a track, sir; have the black fellows been here?"

"Black?" answered Mr. Cameron, "no;

you should know the difference between the white man's track and the black fellows. I could tell you what colour a man was if I saw his print on the sand or in the mud."

"How, sir, could you tell what colour he was without seeing him?" said Jem.

"Why," replied Mr. Cameron, "the foot that has never worn a shoe is very different from ours, which are cramped and deformed by the confinement. The spread of the toes would tell you at once the difference. I could tell you whether it was man, woman, or child, and whether it was an old woman or a young one; for the old women, who habitually carry burdens, press more heavily on the heel than the younger who walk with a more elastic step. This path is too wide for the natives who always go one behind another.

But see, there's a hut or some sort of building, what can it be ?"

Cautiously, silently they crept up and listened. All was silence; they drew nearer and beheld a low, wattled fence about fourteen feet square in front of the little hut. They advanced and looked over. There, enclosed by the fence, was a small pool of water, and on it paddling to and fro was a black swan.

"What is all this for, sir ?" hastily exclaimed the lads; "why is he kept here ?"

"I understand it all," said Mr. Cameron. "I told you that the swans were hunted for their skins which are very valuable, but I should have added that it is almost impossible to detach the skins from their bodies on account of the fat; and this poor thing has been caught and left here to starve that by the time his captors return

they may find him in better condition for their purpose."

"They deserve to be starved themselves," indignantly exclaimed Edward; "what are you going to do with that stick?" continued he, turning to Jem, who had picked up a gum sapling and was preparing to strike the frightened creature.

"For shame," said Mr. Cameron; "put that down;" and stretching over he caught the swan by the neck, and lifting him up set the bird free. Away he scuttled through the bush, and through the trees they could see him regaining the shore and could hear his joyous, musical cry as he swam off to join his long lost companions.

"That's a deed of mercy," said Mr. Cameron; "now for a deed of justice;"

and taking some matches from his pocket he set light to the dry rushes which thatched the little conical hut. The fire leapt up with a roar, and in five minutes a few white ashes were all that remained of that abode of greedy and unfeeling men.

Once more the boat was manned and away. Night fell before they got to the mouth of the Weanderon. The tide had fallen, and great banks of black mud seemed to surround them on every side. Constantly the boat stuck fast. How were they to find the channel of the river which wound its way in a tortuous course. There was every prospect of a night in the boat. Presently Mr. Mann exclaimed :

"You see, Mr. Cameron, long stick here, and there another one long stick. I

believe white man put him there; pull away, by-and-by river."

Straining their eyes through the darkness they crept on from stick to stick, and thus kept their course. It was eleven o'clock when, utterly wearied, they found themselves between the banks and under the shadow of the tall gum trees that fringed the Weanderon.

The wild swans were now startled, and the echoes awakened by the report of Mr. Cameron's rifle, and very pleasant to the travellers came in answer the sound of the barking of the dogs from a newly-formed station. There, they soon found themselves at home, and sat talking far into the night over the adventures of their journey.

Early next morning the boat was launched for home. They passed the

desert island where they had set the swan free, and soon a thin column of blue smoke indicated to them the position of their old camp where Bullet awaited them. On the following day, Smoker, Rattler and little Fly with their companions came bounding to meet them, and Edward could not help singing a verse of "Home, sweet Home" as old Rattler proudly taking his hand in his mouth with irrepressible affection led him to the door of the hut.

CHAPTER XXII.

SHEARING was over. Christmas was past; the autumn heats of January and February were intense. Men and sheep, dogs and horses felt languid and oppressed. The snakes alone were lively and active and seemed to enjoy themselves. No rain had fallen for weeks, millions of grasshoppers covered the ground, and as Edward and Jem, bridle in hand, were one morning searching for the horses, they saw these strange little creatures leaping before them as they walked, and occasionally striking

their hands as they bounded up from the ground. The bush was filled with the harsh cry of the locusts as they sat in thousands upon the boughs of the gum trees.

Treading cautiously to avoid the snakes, and startled every now and then as the dry bark which had fallen from trees crackled under their feet; warily scanning the ground before, as they walked amidst the high tussocks of white grass, the lads saw on the ground scattered here and there of different sizes, some small whitish lumps. Picking them up and tasting them, they found them something like honey and flour, or some delicate confectionery. This was the Australian manna.

"How red the sun looks," said Jem, "and what a mist there is."

"Yes, indeed," answered Edward; "it looks more like the moon than the sun. We can stare at it without dazzling our eyes, and how hot and dry the wind is. There are Billy and Blunder and the rest of the horses. Let's get them home, and get another drink of tea. I am choking already."

Following the horses as they galloped towards home, they soon perceived that something was amiss at the station. They saw Mr. Mann climbing up a gum tree, and cutting down some small boughs, whilst Mr. Cameron stripped to his shirt, with his sleeves tucked up over his bare arms. was arranging the fallen boughs in little bundles on the ground. In the opposite direction Hogan, assisted by two or three blacks, was endeavouring apparently with difficulty to drive the sheep home. His

dog had left him, and was now lying in the mud of the nearly empty water hole. Leaving the horses in the stock-yard, and hanging up the bridles, the lads hastened on to meet Bullet who came out of the gum scrub, armed also with a bundle of leafy boughs.

"What's the matter, Bullet?" cried Edward.

"Matter!" answered Bullet; "why the thunder, or the blacks, or something or other has set the bush on fire, and it's coming down like a race-horse."

"Here, one of you lads," shouted Mr. Cameron; "bring a keg of water and follow us with the boughs, look sharp."

The keg was quickly filled and the two lads, accompanied by Mann's mother and sister, hastened after their master.

"What is it, Mary?" said Jem to the younger woman.

"Big one fire along bush," answered she, and carrying the water and the pannikins they all hurried onwards.

There was something now awful in the scene, they could hardly say what. The sun had quite disappeared, everything around looked strange through the twilight gloom, it was neither night nor day although ten o'clock in the morning. With difficulty they could discern Mr. Cameron's striped shirt; not a hundred yards before them, and around them rose to heaven a volume of thick smoke. They heard the crash of falling timber, and then saw before them a long red line of fire creeping amongst the grass. Here and there where the herbage was short, it fed its way in a wonderful manner, finding

food even where the ground had been eaten bare by the sheep; but in the deep gullies where the bracken stood red and withered, and the grass was rank and deep, and where the dead timber supplied abundant material, it roared with fury under the violence of the wind. In places like this no human power could stay its progress.

Now the use of the green boughs became apparent. Marshalled by Mr. Cameron, a line was formed, and they endeavoured to arrest the spread of the fire in the direction of the station by beating it out with the bushes. Wonderful was it to see the blacks, women as well as men, stand with bare limbs in front of, and even amidst the flames, and whilst encouraging one another with merry shouts like children at play, meet the enemy with undaunted per-

severance. Scalded by the heat and blinded by the smoke, Edward and Jem did their best, but often found, to their dismay, that in lifting up their boughs, they flung pieces of burning bark or grass behind them, and thus while "dousing" it, (as it is called), in one place they lighted the fire in another. Moreover, from time to time the bushes which they used would catch fire, and the bare sticks were useless to stop the progress of the flames. Still there was no word of giving in, Jem, who acted as water-carrier, felt the keg grow lighter from the repeated demands made on it on all sides.

"Stick to it," said Mr. Cameron, whose hands and face were now nearly the same colour as those of Mr. Mann. "Stick to it, if we can keep the fire from crossing the road we shall do. If it beats us there, we

shall lose the paddock fencing and perhaps the huts. Stick to it; it's a fight for life."

"Never say die," said Bullet, and they did stick to it. But the natives surpassed them in endurance of the heat. They even bounded across to the windward of the fire, thus avoiding the smoke in their faces, and walked with their bare feet on the smouldering surface of the ground, over which the flames had a moment before passed.

A stretch of ground which had been fed very bare, now favoured them, and the main danger seemed, after three hours burning toil, to be averted for the present. But it was not over; leaving two or three of the natives to keep watch that the fire did not break out again, they returned to the huts, and such was the effect of the

excitement they had undergone on their nerves, that Edward saw with a sort of terror the fire on which the kettle was boiling.

"Yes," said old Hogan, "fire is a good servant, but he is a bad master. Get some tea, and a mouthful to eat. We have not done yet. Mark my words. The fire will come up against the wind, and we shall have to meet it on this side, as we did on the other. See, Mr. Cameron is getting ready some more boughs; he knows what's coming."

The old shepherd was right, and they saw the dreaded enemy advancing again on the opposite side, the wind bending the long grass over the flames, and thus leading it on. Once more the line was formed, but it was easier work now, for the gale carried away the smoke and heat,

instead of driving it in their faces. The day passed, a weary anxious day it was; darkness came on early, and then the sight was wild and magnificent. The forest seemed hung with ten thousand lanterns, for the fire had crept up the trees, and here and there the dry bark would send out a flag of flame high up in the air. Presently, the welcome sound of thunder was heard, and its echoes, as it rolled amongst the mountains, mingled with the noise of the falling timber. With bare head and outstretched hands, Mr. Cameron was standing in the midst of the party saying:

"I hope the thunder may bring rain."

"I believe big one rain directly," said Mr. Mann. And as he spoke, the bush-fires paled as a dazzling flash of lightning lit up the wild and blackened scene; in another moment they sought the shelter

of the hut, and the rain fell in torrents. One by one the lights went out in the trees, and darkness and silence reigned in the forest of Boniong.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN the shiock logs burnt brightly of an evening, many were the tales which were told sometimes by old Hogan, sometimes by strangers, and sometimes by the blacks. Mr. Mann resided almost continually at Boniong, and one day some of his tribe arrived accompanied by two men and one woman named Lalla Rookh, whom he pointed out as belonging to the Tasmanian black fellow. They were indeed the last survivors of that race which had once, before the arrival of the white man,

peopled Van Diemen's Land as it was then called. Their story was a sad one, very sad, and that evening old Hogan told their history.

"I was," said he, "many years ago a shepherd in that island: there was constant war between us and the natives; and as many as ninety murders, I have heard, were committed in one year. At last the governor ordered all the white men to turn out and to make a line across the country and drive the blacks into a corner, and so capture them. The line was formed, and away we marched, and after days of travel and nights of watching, we came to the sea and found that every single black fellow had escaped, we did not catch one."

"How did they manage to escape?" asked Edward.

"Why," answered Hogan, "don't you remember the other day, when you were riding along the track that the black boy, Lively, took your straw hat off your head, as you rode underneath the trees?"

"Yes," said Edward; "and I could not think whatever had become of it, until I heard him laugh, and saw him waving it in his hand."

"And how could we prevent them passing us during the night, with their dark bodies in the thick scrub, through which they would glide as silently and as quietly as snakes? However, they were caught at last, and it was done in this manner. There was a clever fellow named Robinson who had learnt their language, and had won their confidence, and he persuaded them that he would lead

them on to victory if they followed him; so, one fine morning, led by this man, the blacks came on to attack the town of Launceston, throwing their spears in the air, dancing and shouting. It was a strange sight; on they came, thinking the settlement was in their power, when suddenly the white men showed out on every side; the red coats with their flashing bayonets; a terrible spectacle for the poor naked savages enclosed around them. It was their last war dance. They were taken on shipboard and transported to Norfolk Island, a beautiful spot, where they were supplied with abundance of everything; but of what use was a lovely island and plenty of food to these poor creatures who had lost their home? They would stand on the edge of the shore, and gaze in the direction of their native land, looking wistfully over the

waste of waters, but return was impossible, and they pined away, broken hearted, and died one by one. Lalla Rookh and these two men are the only survivors."

"Well, truly," said Edward, "that is a very sad story. But when I was riding back from Melbourne with Mr. Mann last week, I picked up a skull by the side of the track which belonged to a black fellow killed in a great fight which took place there many years ago. He told me that nearly all his tribe perished on that day. His elder brother swam across the head of the bay some two miles, and so escaped. He pointed out with a shudder the honeysuckle trees, which were visibly bent by the influence of the prevailing westerly winds, and said in a half terrified voice while he turned away his eyes, that the spirits of the dead sitting on the boughs

above the graves had bent the trees into that shape. I tried as well as I could to tell him about another world and a heaven for the good; and he asked me at once whether any of his hated enemies, the Two-fold Bay Blacks, would be there? 'If so,' said he, 'there would be a big one fight in heaven.' When I spoke of peace and forgiving his enemies, he shook his head and did not seem to understand me, so I gave it up."

"Yes," said Hogan, "mercy and forgiveness are matters the blacks know nothing about; the first thing the children learn is to kill. I saw one the other day thrust a little parrot which he had caught into the fire alive, and while it struggled in its dying agonies he looked up to me and said laughing, and shewing his white teeth, 'Poor little fellow.' He had learnt the

English which expresses mercy, but he had not learnt the feeling."

"Well," continued Edward, "when we came to Billeet Mr. Mann told me another story."

"Let's hear it," said Jem; "I like these stories."

"Then I'll tell it as Mr. Mann told me. Many years ago there lived a native named Ge-arm. Even when he was a lad he surpassed all his companions in the use of his weapons. When he took his shield and waddy no one could stand before him, he used to make a mock of them all; and, patting the little boys on the head, would say, 'Make haste and grow big, and when you are big enough to fight I'll break your heads too.' So the brave Ge-arm was feared by them all, and hated too; one day the whole tribe rose up against him and

commenced flinging their spears at him. Thick and fast came the whistling missiles, but Ge-arm, active as a tiger and keen-eyed as an eagle, dashed them aside with his little shield or avoided them. The day was very hot, and the poor fellow began to suffer from weariness as the fight went on. At last a pointed lance struck his naked body, he turned and fled. Next day his old father tracked him by the blood which marked his course through the bracken and on the sand, and here, said Mr. Mann, he found him at Billeet amongst the rushes lying half in and half out of the water whither he had fled to slake his death thirst. Ge-arm was dead."

"Well, that is a sad story too," said Jem.

"Indeed, it just is," answered Hogan; "but I will tell something more about

those Twofold Bay Blacks, Edward, that you were speaking of, and this took place not many months ago. You know Micky, Mr. Anderson's stock-keeper, the Irishman, who made us laugh so the other day with his story about the bull in the china shop? It was from him that I heard this account. Mr. Anderson's station, you know, is situated at the head of the other bay near that island where you found the swan, and close to the forty-mile scrub, which divides this country from the Twofold Bay district. One morning Micky and his companion Terry were milking the cows in the stock yard; hearing a confused sound they looked up and saw some sixty or seventy naked blacks coming towards them. At first they thought it was Mr. Mann's tribe, but they were soon undeceived, and hastily fled to the master's

hut and barred the door. There was one woman on the station, and she was shut outside; and through the slabs of the hut they saw her surrounded by these wild men who were pulling her about and laughing at the strange dress which they had never seen before. Terry went out bravely into the crowd, and, dragging her in, again fastened the door.

"The hut was not plastered, and through the wide cracks there looked in upon them the staring eyes of the terrible horde which now closely surrounded them. Not only that, but some of the wild men now climbed on the roof, and throwing down some of the sheets of bark, looked through and laughed. Micky, through sheer fright, pulled the trigger of his gun, and when it went off the black men again laughed, being in perfect ignorance of the

nature of the weapon. Pushing their long spears through, the blacks fished every article out of the dwelling, and Micky saw his much loved watch dragged out, hanging by its chain on the barbs of a ten-foot lance. Apparently satisfied with the fun the blacks went away, and the run was littered with the tin dishes which they had taken from the dairy and then flung away as useless."

As Hogan finished his tale, the notes of Mr. Cameron's flute sounded clear and sweet; the distant roar of the surf bore a deep and solemn accompaniment to the music, and the thoughts of wild men and wild life gave place to the gentler memories of old England and home.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"WHERE's Jem?" asked Bullet, one evening as Edward was taking off the saddle from Billy Button, who shewed signs of hard riding.

"We parted," answered Edward, "on the side of the mountain; he was galloping after a mob of wild cattle and spurring old Blunder till he was nearly mad. That was three hours ago, he can't have lost his way; he ought to have been back by this time."

Billy Button was now free from saddle

and bridle, and commenced cropping the grass at once to lose no time, when they were joined by Mr. Mann who pointed towards the road and said :

"Blunder come back—where Jem ?"

Hastily the three of them went towards the horse, who was dragging his bridle along the ground and feeding towards the hut. He was covered with foam, and his sides were marked deeply with the spurs. What had happened ? Evidently something unusual. The horse snorted with fear as they approached, and seemed altogether disquieted. They had to drive him to the stockyard before they could catch him ; and when divested of saddle and bridle, he looked sullen and frightened. Something was wrong. What was it? Had Jem been thrown ? or worse ?

Mr. Cameron now joined them stock

whip in hand; he looked anxiously at the horse, who stood with his head down, occasionally turning round uneasily at his galled flanks.

"I hope," said the master, "nothing serious has happened; he always would use the spurs like a madman, and old Blunder when his temper is up is an awkward customer. He'll bolt through and over anything when tormented by his rider, and so I always told Jem, but he never has any feeling for horse or dog. If he does not come home shortly we must turn out and search for him; but it is getting late and in another hour we shall not be able to see the tracks of the horse."

A weary hour passed, and the sun was shining through the tops of the tall gum trees. Edward stood at the door of the

hut gazing intently in the direction from which the horse had come. Once he caught sight of a figure moving amongst the trees at about half a mile distance, and was just preparing to raise a cry of "Here he comes!" when a long white line, advancing through the bush, shewed him that it was old Hogan with the sheep coming home.

Deeply distressed, and foreboding he knew not what, he walked into Mr. Cameron's hut, saying:

"What can we do, sir? Jem is not come and it's getting dark."

"Why," answered his master, who was ramming a bullet down his rifle, "that is just the question I was asking myself. Call Mr. Mann and let us take up the tracks of the horse and follow on as far as we can to-night. There is no sign of rain,

so Mr. Mann will easily follow the hoofs if it were for twenty miles. Find Jem we must and shall; if not to-night at any rate to-morrow."

Beginning their search on the spot where they had first seen the frightened horse, Mr. Mann having bestowed a keen and scrutinising gaze on the hoof-prints, at once started on the quest, walking freely and fast, without the least hesitation or doubt. He did not seem even to cast his eyes down on the ground, but looked steadily forward along the track; so strong, so piercing was his sight that he read the imprint on the path twenty feet ahead of them, and although, at times, Blunder appeared to have left the road, taking short cuts across the windings, yet he never for one moment showed the least doubt, and when Mr. Cameron for an

instant lost the signs and asked: "Where now?" without answering a word, the black protruded his lips in the direction where he saw the marks of the trail some distance in front.

With unabated pace, and in silence, the party travelled for about three miles along the track, when Mr. Mann suddenly stopped, and pointing to the bush on the right hand, said in his rude way:

"You see horse come this way. Sun all gone, to-morrow morning find him."

It was indeed too true, night had fallen, the bush was thick and scrubby, filled with fallen logs, and the shadows lay deep and dark, so that it was impossible to follow the trail. After trying to prosecute their search a short distance through the scrub, they returned to the road and there took counsel together.

"How far off, was it, Edward, where he left you?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"About two miles," said Edward almost in tears; "on the side of the mountain, amongst the grass trees."

"Well, then, let us cooey," said his master, and at the word he raised his voice and sent forth the shrill, peculiar cry which the Australian bushmen had learnt from the natives. Edward with his utmost powers imitated him, and lastly Mr. Mann sent a long, clear yell, which seemed to go up to the stars, which were now shining in the heavens. Then, holding their breath in silence, with their heads turned down, they listened. Edward gave a convulsive start of hope which changed with lightning swiftness to disappointment as he heard the coconyella wildly laugh out his evening song. They then cracked

their whips, and finally Mr. Cameron awoke the echoes of the mountains by discharging his rifle. Again they listened, but the silence was unbroken save by the bustling rush of little Smut, the terrier, as he ran to and fro amongst the thick herbage.

There was nothing for it but to return home and wait for the morning.

"Perhaps we shall find him at home," said Edward.

"I fear not," answered Mr. Cameron, and he repeated his words, "we may, but I fear not. I mistrusted it when I saw the horse; he told us as plainly as if he could speak, that something was wrong."

The stars were shining clear and bright when they reached the huts, and never did night seem so long to Edward. More than once he started from his bed and

rushed to the door, thinking he heard some noise; there was the occasional bleat of the sheep from the fold, but poor Jem came not.

"Take all the dogs with you," said Mr. Cameron early on the following morning, as they started to renew the quest. They quickly reached the spot where they had stopped the night before, and Mr. Mann took up the tracks and plunged into the forest scrub. The course overnight had been straight as Blunder in his return had kept the track, but now it wound in all directions round logs and fallen trees, this way and that way as would be the case with a masterless horse. Presently the traces became more clear, and Mr. Mann showed by the depth of the impression and the length of stride, that the horse had been galloping.

They were approaching a deep gully which ran down from the mountains, when Mr. Mann stood still, and pointing to a tree about a hundred yards ahead, and to a magnificent black eagle perched on a high, bare, dead tree close to it, said in a low tone suppressed with awe :

"I believe there."

Slowly leaving the tracks they advanced. Underneath the bough of a low gnarled gum tree, lay poor Jem Johnson, with his whip in his hand and his face turned upwards to the sky. The horse in unmanageable fury had carried him against that bough, and death had been instantaneous.

There was not a dry eye amongst blacks or whites, as they gathered to hear Mr. Cameron read the funeral service, when two days afterwards they stood beside the

first white man's grave that had ever been dug at Boniong. Memories past and present crowded bitterly on Edward's mind as he turned away from the last resting-place of his friend.

"I hoped we two might have gone back to Uphill some day; but now, wherever I may go, he will stop here."

CHAPTER XXV.

TIME rolled on, and few could recognise in the tall, strong young man, now manager at Boniong station, the slight lad who had landed from the *Blackwall*. His unvarying kindness and watchful attention to the stock had made Edward invaluable to his master, especially at lambing time, when the greatest watchfulness and patience are needed. Not every one can distinguish one sheep from another in a flock, to an unpractised eye they all seem so much alike. Edward could not only, having

once fixed his eyes upon a sheep, recognise it again among a thousand, but had names for many whom he called his favourites. It was a beautiful sight at lambing time to see the flock brought up to the hurdles of an evening, especially when the lambs were old enough to skip and jump. Instead of following their mother's like good children into the fold, some hundreds would make believe that they could not find the entrance, and run bounding and shaking their heads and whisking their tales round and round. It was useless to send a dog, they would not mind him. Meantime, the anxious mothers would rend the air with their cries, and occasionally an old ewe, who ought to have known better from her years and experience, would join the white-headed crowd and gambol in the midst of them. It was always a

scene of noise and disorder and confusion. An hour of patient trouble was often spent before the whole flock could be safely folded, and then much more time was required before each mother could find her own darling amongst that truant and undisciplined mob. Hungry and thirsty with their gallop, the lambs would sometimes run at the first ewe they met, calculating that if it were not their mother, she would do just as well, and would be received with a butt from the head of the old one, as much as to say, "No child of mine, go and find your own mother," and then they would stand lamenting, till the voice and the caressing nose told them that they were right at last.

Edward would see them all settled down before he left the fold at night; it was pretty to see them lying side by side the

old mother whilst chewing the cud, occasionally forgetting that she had found her lamb, and then reminding herself of the fact by turning round and smelling it.

Here and there, before they lay down to rest, two or three young ones would stand up for a fight, and two of them, bending their little heads, would run at one another, pretending to be very fierce, and then having given each other a slight knock, they would shake their woolly frontlets as much as to say: "I don't like that."

Meantime, two or three more would come up and act as policemen, and bending down their heads too, would strike the combatants on their side, as much as to say, "Can't you be quiet, and keep the peace?" At last quiet would be restored, with only an occasional bleat during the

night, till morning and the open fold awakened them to fresh fights and gambols.

Edward now rode his own horse which he had himself purchased and broken in; indeed, he had broken in several for his master, and although many better and more experienced riders than himself might have been thrown, he never had a single misfortune; this was owing to the kindness and patience which he shewed.

A horse is very strong and very spirited, but he is one of the most shy and timid of animals, and when first roped, the sight, the smell, and the voice of man, affect him with maddening terror. Quiet and gentle handling will alone overcome this, whilst violence will often, although subduing him for the time, render him permanently timorous and treacherous.

Besides, he does not know what he is required to do, when he has learnt that and found that he must obey, he soon takes pleasure in doing his work. Moreover the kind master has this advantage—that he can always catch his horse, whereas the ill-used animal will lead his master many a weary mile through wet grass and scrub before he will allow the hated bridle to be placed round his neck.

The old stockmen laughed at Edward and his milk and water ways as they called them, but they soon found out that he was wiser as well as better than they. When one of these men was about to bring down his tremendous stock whip on a young filly who was spirited and troublesome when first roped, Edward said something to him from a book which the old stock man had never read about man "having dominion

over the beasts of the field," and that every king should be mild in his rule, the old bushman laughed and tauntingly replied :

"Well, young man, if you are a king, and you may be, for I never saw one, and you are going to make your throne on the back of that filly, I think you will be like a good many more kings who have lost their seat, and you will find your throne on the grass."

But the old bushman was wrong and Edward was right, for kindness will do more than cruelty. But men like these led a wild life in which they learnt much that was bad and little that was good. Their hearts had been hardened by wild and wicked ways, and they had not grown up among friends so kind and true as Edward had known at Uphill.

More than once he had seen scenes at Melbourne which made his heart bleed; scenes of such folly and extravagance that they seemed more like the outcomings of insanity than the actions of reasonable and accountable beings. Men who had earned some sixty or eighty pounds from six or eight months labour, either from splitting timber or shearing, or other work, would arrive in town with their knapsacks on their backs, dusty, weary, and thirsty. They would go straight to the bank, and with their money in their pockets go next to some favoured public-house, and throwing their banknotes on the table shout for rum, gin, brandy, beer, and wine, to be brought in at once. They would summon all within hearing to join them in their frantic indulgence, and there would be always found hanging about

these places a group of idle revellers only too ready to accept the invitation. A few days of wild and stupid intoxication and all their earnings won through many a long day by the sweat of their brow, would be exhausted.

When all was gone they would pitifully ask the rapacious landlord to give them a glass of rum, and then with bloated face and trembling limbs, ragged as they came, they would turn their steps towards the bush to begin their toil again, and again would return to squander their earnings in the same reckless and wicked manner.

By the advice of Mr. Cameron, Edward had invested his wages in horses and sheep, and found himself quickly richer than he had ever hoped or expected to be. He was no longer called "Edward" by the men, but Mr. Ford the manager.

It was on one of these journeys to Melbourne, that, calling as usual at the post office for letters, having first inquired in his master's name, he then asked if there were any for Mr. Edward Ford. The postmaster handed him one in the well known and welcome writing of Mr. Moreton. The stockman was holding his horse in the street; he could have opened his letter then, but he would not.

Placing it carefully in his breast pocket he waited until they had crossed the river and were in the quiet of the bush before he broke the seal. What he read there our concluding chapter will tell.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BILLY BUTTON never stumbled; you might have ridden him safely up and downstairs had there been any stairs at Boniong. Edward let the reins lie upon his neck as he held the letter in his hands and read the sad news of his father's death, and his mother's request that he would return home. Silently he and his companion rode on. At midday, as they were cantering along the ten mile beach as it is called, he raised his head at the exclamation of the stockman who had said:

"Sure enough here comes the master on Freedom."

A speck was seen in the distance on the sands, it was, indeed, Mr. Cameron; to whom as he asked "Any letters, Ford?" Edward handed his own with the others.

Whilst Mr. Cameron was reading, Edward dismounted, and watched the blue waves as they came tumbling in and broke with a gentle ripple on the fine hard yellow sand.

"Well," said Mr. Cameron, looking up from the letter, "Mr. Moreton writes me that you are wanted, and I am sure you will not hesitate to obey your mother's wishes. For my part I shall lose not only a servant but a friend in losing you. Perhaps when matters are settled, you will come back again; at any rate you are able to go home with a good character and a

pocket full of money. Your old friend the *Blackwall* is out again for a cargo of wool, so you can go by her if you like, she sails in about a fortnight; but I shall be very sorry to part with you, Ford, very sorry."

"And so shall I," said the stockman rubbing his eyes with his blue shirt sleeves; "and so will everybody else be in our parts."

Boniong had been so long Edward's home, that he could not leave it without visiting the various spots endeared to him by recollection and adventure. The place where he had fought the kangaroo with Paddy, the fatal spot where poor Jock had done battle with the snake, the mimosa plain where he had found the children, and, last of all, the grave of poor Jem over which the grass was now waving.

"You must tie up Fly and Rattler,"

said he on the morning of his departure to William and Micky, who with the blacks and whites had assembled to bid him farewell; or they will be sure to follow me. Take care of Billy Button, Micky."

"I will," answered Micky; "perhaps you will come back and ride him again."

Mr. Mann seemed quite unable to repress his emotions, but turned away, muttering in a deep voice:

"Kei, Mr. Ford, kei;" whilst an old black fellow who had called himself Edward's father, sat down and beating two sticks together, gave vent to his feelings by roaring out a long, monotonous song, mournfully wagging his head to and fro.

Edward, as he rode away, turned round in the saddle, and took a last gaze at the whitewashed walls of the huts. A bend of

the road, and they were hid; he wiped his eyes and said to himself:

"Well, now for home, but which is my home, it is hard to say."

* * * * *

Some few weeks afterwards, as the train stopped at Ongarford, a tall, brown-faced young gentleman stepped out upon the platform, and stood for a minute or so, looking around him with a smiling face, yet with a grave and interested manner. He seemed to be in a sort of dream, from which he was startled by one of the porters who touched his hat and asked him:

"Do you want a fly, sir? or shall I take your luggage?"

The stranger started, and in a loud deep voice replied:

"Fly! Yes, at once, to Uphill; put my luggage in, if you please."

As they drove through the streets of Ongarford, Edward looked first from one window then from the other.

Oh, how little altered, yet how strange it all appeared. The people wore an air so sad and pale and serious, so different from the reckless and jovial bearing of men in the colonies; besides, there were so many old and infirm people, and everything seemed so orderly.

The roads and the hedges appeared to him something wonderful for their neatness, but the fields were so small, and everything was kept like a garden! But his thoughts took a warmer colouring as the distant view of the downs and Uphill Tower met his eager gaze.

"How slow," said he to himself, "this wheeled thing goes! One touch of the

spurs, and Billy Button would bring me there in two minutes."

Presently the sound of the village bells came upon his ear with inexpressible sweetness. They were now at a slow walk, mounting the steep hill, when they met a ploughman in his smock frock and gaiters coming down.

"What's up to-day?" said the flyman to the rustic.

"Why," answered the man in his long, slow, Baconshire accent; "I've heard as Ned Ford is coming back to-day from Australia."

He would have said more, but Edward's ringing voice, "How are you, Dobson?" seemed almost to paralyse him with amazement. Edward could not help laughing as the fly went on, to see his old schoolfellow standing on the spot where

they had met, and staring still after him.

Soon they entered Uphill, and, at Edward's order, the carriage stopped at his mother's door. The first person that came out to meet him was a dark-haired boy, who looked at him wonderingly, and in whom Edward recognised his youngest brother Dick.

"Why, Dick," he exclaimed; "you were in petticoats when I left, and your hair was whitey-brown."

The boy shouted out, "Mother, he's come!" and a pale woman dressed in black, flung her arms round the young man as he entered the cottage.

The news soon spread, and accompanied by all the village that was not at work in the fields, Edward headed a procession to the Vicarage. At the door stood Mr. and

Mrs. Moreton, and pleasantly in his ears sounded the hearty welcome of his revered and early friend.

"I prophesied," said the Vicar, "that you would do well. I've heard all about you from Mr. Cameron. I could have wished that you had not come back alone, but poor Jem's people have left the parish some time back; and these things must be as they are, for they are beyond our control. Nothing can give me greater pleasure than to find that your early training has not been in vain, and that the kindness to animals, which you showed when quite a little boy, has been, under Providence, the chief cause of your success in life."

A good situation as manager of an estate was soon offered to Edward, and I have only to add, that whilst faithfully

fulfilling the duties of his new position, in spring time when the woods were budding green, or when autumn clothed the woodlands in russet-brown, during his work by day, and in his dreams by night, Edward's thoughts often wandered to the changeless verdure of Australia and to the pleasant days he had passed in the forest of Boniong.

THE END.